

# Transforming the Lives of Trafficking Survivors and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Victims in Andhra Pradesh

- A Journey of Empowerment



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# "Transforming the Lives of Trafficking Survivors and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Victims in Andhra Pradesh"

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# CONTENTS

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## 1. Foreword

## 2. Case studies

### 2.1 Livelihoods - New Beginnings, Earned Futures

1. Ms. Lakshmi
2. Ms. Anitha
3. Ms. Radhika
4. Ms. Kiranmai
5. Ms. Sarala

### 2.2 Victim Compensation:

1. Ms. Anjali
2. Ms. Bhanupriya
3. Ms. Parvathi

### 2.3 Debt trap:

1. Ms. Srivalli
2. Ms. Durga
3. Ms. Pameela
4. Ms. Thrisha
5. Ms. Swathi
6. Ms. Jyothi

### 2.3 From Survivors to Leaders:

1. Ms. Saraswathi
2. Ms. Bjamma
3. Ms. Chitti
4. Ms. Rani
5. Ms. Anitha
6. Ms. chitra

### 2.4 "From Silence to Social Security":

1. Ms. Jamuna
2. Ms. Ramya
3. Ms. Ramysri
4. Ms. Suvartha
5. Ms. Mary
6. Ms. Menaka

## 3 Mental Health to Empowered Lives

1. Ms. Shanti
2. Ms. Neeraja

# Foreword

At **HELP** (Society for Help Entire Lower & rural People- HELP), we believe that every story has its own unique power in transforming many lives —not just the lives of those who live them, but also of those who hear them. However, paying attention over the spirit of such story could be the curve of crux to that transformation. This collection of case studies extracted out of our years long real-time experiences mainly from the Leadership Next Programme since 2018 in which we have built the leadership skills and qualities of survivors of trafficking and enabled them to resolve their psycho-social and legal issues. we are immensely thankful to **Kamonohashi – Japan** and **Tafteesh** for supporting this **Leadership Next Programme**. The champions of survivors who are the heart of this honest effort and this compilation represents the voices of resilience, the strength of survival, and the courage and confidence that it takes to reclaim one's future.

For over three decades, we have walked alongside some of the most vulnerable communities—sex workers, trafficking survivors, and their children—supporting them in their fight for dignity, justice, and opportunity. These stories are not merely narratives of hardship; they are testimonials of transformation, of hope, and of the tireless efforts of survivors, frontline workers, and allies who refused to give up inspiring the world to wake up and extend solidarity to survivors.

This booklet is more than a document—it's a window into the realities we work with, the lives we touch, and the change we strive to create every day in the dynamic lives of such diversified and distinguished communities. It is a reminder that behind every statistic is a human being with dreams, fears, and immense potential that open the eyes to transform the lives.

We are grateful to the survivors who chose to share their journeys, and to the team members and partners who make this work possible. May these stories inspire deeper understanding, compassion, and commitment to the cause of justice and empowerment joining hands to act in solidarity to the survivors seeking a helping hand.

We express our thanks to **Mr. Pavan kumar** Programme Manager for preparing the case studies, **Mr. Bhaskar** Programme Coordinator and field staff to collect the change stories from our target communities where they are working so far in the auspicious association of survivors collectives. Our sincere gratitude to the **DASRA** and **Rebuild India Fund – Flexible funds** for supporting to publish this empirical edition of change stories.

With Solidarity,

Ram Mohan NVS

Secretary – HELP

Livelihoods –  
New Beginnings, Earned Futures



## Weaving a Future: Lakshmi's Livelihood Transformation

### A Business of Her Own

Lakshmi (name Changed) sat at her small shop, skillfully weaving jasmine and rose garlands, the scent filling the air around her. Customers stopped by, placing orders for temple offerings and weddings. A woman from the neighbourhood admired the fresh flowers and said, "Your garlands are always the best, Lakshmi. The temple priest asks for them by name."

She smiled—each garland she sold was not just an income, but a symbol of her journey toward independence. Not long ago, she had no control over her life. Now, she was a businesswoman.



### The Struggles That Led to Change

Lakshmi's life had not always been like this. Married at just 14 years old, she had no opportunity for education or financial security. With two daughters to raise and her husband's taxi earnings barely covering their expenses, she felt trapped. Employment opportunities were scarce, and social norms made it difficult for women like her to find stable work.

Desperate to provide for her family, she took small loans, but high interest rates soon turned them into a financial burden. She had no skills, no savings, and no knowledge of how to break free from economic dependency. She often watched flower vendors at the market, wondering if she, too, could sell something of her own one day.

### Finding a Path to Livelihood

One morning, as she walked through the marketplace, Lakshmi noticed a group of women gathered under a tree, deep in discussion. Curious, she stepped closer and overheard words that would change her life: "You don't have to live in debt. You can earn with dignity."

It was a VIMUKTI meeting, a collective supporting women in vulnerable situations. She hesitated at first but stayed to listen. That day, she learned about Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and financial literacy programs. She met other women who had transformed their lives through small businesses. Encouraged, she decided to join.

Through HELP and VIMUKTI, Lakshmi secured a small loan and enrolled in garland-making training. It felt daunting at first, but the supportive network of women around her gave her confidence.

### From Learner to Entrepreneur

Lakshmi's first garland was uneven, the flowers not tied tightly enough. But she kept practicing. After weeks of training, she made her first sale at a temple, earning Rs. 500. It felt like a new beginning.

She reinvested her profits, improved her craft, and soon expanded to selling at festivals and weddings, earning Rs. 3,000–4,000 per month.

Her business grew. Every morning, she carefully handpicked fresh jasmine, roses, and marigolds from a wholesale market, learning to negotiate fair prices. Over time, she hired two other women to help during peak seasons, empowering others just as she had been empowered. For the first time, she was financially independent, supporting her daughters' education and managing household expenses without loans.

### **Overcoming Challenges**

Despite her progress, Lakshmi faced obstacles. During festival seasons, demand skyrocketed, but so did flower prices. Learning to budget, manage seasonal demand, and maintain profits was a challenge. Some customers still judged her past, whispering about her struggles. But she stood firm, letting her work speak for itself.

One year, she received a bulk order for a wedding—her largest yet. With the help of her two assistants, she worked tirelessly through the night, weaving garlands that would be seen by hundreds. When the bride's family praised her work, she knew she had truly made it.

### **Becoming a Mentor**

Lakshmi's transformation went beyond her business. She rose through VIMUKTI's ranks, becoming a leader advocating for women's economic empowerment. She now helps others access government benefits, secure identity documents, and start their own small businesses.

One of the women she trained, Meena, shared, "Lakshmi showed me that I could start my own business. Now, I don't have to depend on anyone."

She no longer hides from society's judgment. She teaches other women to stand tall and earn with dignity.

### **Expanding Her Vision**

With her garland business thriving, Lakshmi is already thinking bigger. She dreams of starting a cooperative where women can learn skills and work together, creating more economic opportunities for others in her community. She envisions training at least 15–20 women in garland making and small business management, ensuring they, too, can earn a stable income.

“Financial independence changes everything,” she says. “Now, I want to help other women believe in themselves the way VIMUKTI helped me believe in myself.”

### Lessons and Impact

- **Entrepreneurial Growth:** Lakshmi built a sustainable business and expanded it to empower others.
- **Economic Independence:** From struggling to survive to supporting her family with dignity.
- **Community Leadership:** As a VIMUKTI leader, she helps others start their own livelihoods.
- **A Vision for Women’s Empowerment:** Plans to start a women-run cooperative, training others in financial stability and business skills.

### Conclusion

Lakshmi’s story is a testament to the power of skills, financial literacy, and community support. Her journey proves that with the right guidance and opportunities, women can transform their lives—not just for themselves, but for future generations.

She no longer sees herself as someone struggling to survive. She is a businesswoman, a mentor, and a leader.

## Against All Odds: Anitha’s Journey to Independence

### A Life Marked by Hardships

“I have been deceived twice in my life. Still, I am striving with a ray of hope to survive along with my two children,” said Anitha. Born into a poor family, she migrated from Chennai to Vijayawada with her family in search of a better life. Losing her father at a young age, she watched her mother struggle as the sole provider for six children—three elder brothers and two elder sisters.

To support her family, Anitha began working as a salesgirl in a clothing shop. At 17, she married a man from her workplace who had won her trust in the name of love. However, she soon realized his true nature—he was a drunkard with no job, no earnings, and a violent temper. He harassed Anitha, suspecting her of infidelity. Within a year, he abandoned her completely, leaving her to fend for herself with no knowledge of his whereabouts.





## **A Second Betrayal and Struggles for Survival**

Determined to rebuild her life, Anitha continued working at the clothing shop, commuting daily by auto-rickshaw. During this time, she met an auto driver who assured her of a better future. Trusting his promises, she began living with him, hoping for stability. However, her struggles only deepened—he forced her to quit her job, and after giving birth to two children, he became violent, subjecting her to both mental and physical abuse.

**“He stopped me from my job. After giving birth to two children, he too turned violent and harassed me both mentally and physically where I couldn’t bear it any longer,”** she recalled in anguish.

One day, he disappeared without a trace, leaving Anitha and her children in a desperate situation. With no financial support and no other options, she was forced into prostitution to ensure her family’s survival.

## **A Ray of Hope: Finding Support**

While struggling in silence, Anitha learned about VIMUKTHI, a collective supporting survivors of human trafficking and victims of commercial sexual exploitation. A friend encouraged her to attend one of their community meetings. Initially hesitant, she listened to the experiences of other women and realized that she, too, deserved a dignified life.

Through VIMUKTHI, she received counseling, emotional support, and legal awareness training. Alongside HELP, the organization provided her with guidance on financial planning, access to government support schemes, and opportunities to rebuild her livelihood through dignified means. They encouraged her to pursue an alternative income source and regain control over her life.

With their support, Anitha started a small Tiffin center, enabling her to earn a respectable livelihood. HELP and VIMUKTHI facilitated initial financial assistance, connected her with women entrepreneurs, and provided ongoing mentorship to ensure the sustainability of her new business.

## **Rebuilding Her Life Through Livelihood**

Starting the business was challenging—she faced social stigma, struggled to attract customers, and lacked initial capital. However, with continuous encouragement from VIMUKTHI and HELP leaders, she gradually built her confidence. She reinvested her earnings wisely, expanded her customer base, and developed a stable income.

**“I have started a small Tiffin center with Rs. 1,000 in front of my home itself. I am making Rs. 600 a day now after spending on necessary materials for the business. I am happy with my children,”** she expressed with relief and hope.

Over time, her food business flourished. She began earning a steady income, ensuring food security and education for her children. No longer dependent on exploitative sources of income, she took control of her future. HELP and VIMUKTHI continued to support her, providing training on business management and linking her with self-help groups (SHGs) for financial security.

## **Lessons and Impact**

- **Economic Empowerment:** Anitha transitioned from extreme vulnerability to self-reliance through entrepreneurship.
- **Community Support:** HELP and VIMUKTHI played a crucial role in her transformation, offering financial and emotional guidance.
- **Resilience and Hope:** Despite repeated betrayals, she persevered to secure a better future for her children.
- **Dignified Livelihood:** She now earns through legal means, breaking free from exploitation.
- **Financial Stability:** By joining SHGs, she gained access to small loans and business opportunities, ensuring long-term security.

## Conclusion

Anitha's story is a testament to the power of resilience and the impact of collective support. From betrayal and hardship to independence and stability, she has demonstrated the importance of livelihood opportunities for women in crisis. Today, she stands as an inspiration to other women facing similar struggles.

**"I never imagined I could live with dignity again. Today, I stand strong—not just for myself, but for my children and for women like me."**

## From Shadows to Success: Radhika's Fight for Dignity

### Overcoming Poverty and Neglect

Radhika, a 22-year-old mother of four, faced extreme poverty and social neglect in RR Pet, Vijayawada. With no education, a non-contributing husband, and no steady income, survival was an everyday struggle. Even feeding her children a single meal seemed impossible.

"My tenants and relatives saw our condition but turned their faces away. No one cared," Radhika recalls.

### Discovering VIMUKTHI: A Turning Point

During one of her lowest moments, Radhika learned about **VIMUKTHI Survivors Collective**, a support group for women facing similar struggles. Attending a meeting, she heard inspiring stories of women rebuilding their lives. Encouraged by the collective and **Bhaskar, a Project Coordinator from HELP**, she dared to dream of starting her own small business.

### Transforming a Skill into a Livelihood

Having cooked all her life, Radhika saw an opportunity in starting a **Tiffin center**. With an initial investment of **Rs. 1,000** from HELP, she began preparing and selling affordable, home-cooked meals like idlis and dosas outside her home.



At first, customers were few, and doubts were many, but she persisted. Slowly, word spread among auto drivers and daily wage workers, and soon, she was earning **Rs. 600 a day**—enough to support her children and sustain her household.

**“For the first time, I felt what it meant to earn with dignity,”** Radhika shares.

### Challenges and Determination

Balancing household chores, child care, and business responsibilities was not easy. Facing societal judgment, she learned to ignore whispers and focus on her children's future. With ongoing guidance from VIMUKTHI and HELP, she learned financial planning and business management skills, ensuring gradual growth.

### A Dream Beyond Survival

Radhika's Tiffin center is more than a business—it's a symbol of **resilience and empowerment**. She now dreams of expanding into a **catering service** and hiring another woman in need.

“I know what it feels like to be helpless. If I can, I want to help another woman stand on her own feet,” she says with quiet determination.

### Key Learnings and Impact

- **Economic Independence:** Radhika now earns daily and supports her family.
- **Resilience:** She overcame poverty, neglect, and stigma to rebuild her life.
- **The Power of Support:** VIMUKTHI and HELP's mentorship played a crucial role in her transformation.
- **Paying It Forward:** She aspires to support other women in similar situations.

### Conclusion: A Story of Hope and Strength

Radhika's journey demonstrates how **livelihood opportunities can transform lives**. With the right support, small steps lead to powerful change. Her story is not just about personal survival but about breaking cycles of poverty and dependence.

HELP and VIMUKTHI continue mentoring Radhika, tracking her progress and connecting her to **government micro-enterprise schemes**. Her success story is part of the **Livelihood Empowerment Initiative** by HELP NGO, aimed at empowering women survivors through skill-building, micro-enterprise support, and financial literacy.

### Future Aspirations

Radhika aims to expand her catering business and train vulnerable women in her community, creating **sustainable livelihood opportunities** for others.

Through determination and community support, Radhika has stepped out of the shadows and into a future of self-reliance, dignity, and hope.



## Breaking Barriers: How Kiranmai Rebuilt Her Livelihood

### *Purpose of the Case Study:*

This case study highlights Kiranmai's transition from vulnerability to self-reliance through livelihood revival. It showcases how targeted interventions by VIMUKTHI and HELP empowered her to rebuild a family business, secure her children's future, and inspire other women.

### **Background and Challenges**

Kiranmai, (name changed) a 26-year-old from RR Pet, Vijayawada, lost her husband six years ago, leaving her solely responsible for her three daughters (ages 10, 8, and 7). Initially supported by her late father-in-law, his passing worsened her financial struggles. Raising a child with special needs, Srilatha, further compounded her difficulties, making it challenging to balance household expenses and education.



### **Finding Support: VIMUKTHI and HELP**

Her turning point came when HELP's Livelihood Coordinator, Eswari, and VIMUKTHI leaders conducted a community meeting. Encouraged by Anitha, a VIMUKTHI leader, Kiranmai joined a Self-Help Group (SHG) under the Shakti Programme in Krishna District. Through this network, she found emotional and financial guidance, instilling hope for a better future.

### **Reviving a Family Business**

With continuous mentoring, Kiranmai secured a Rs. 35,000 loan through her SHG's second bank linkage. Instead of starting from scratch, she revived her late uncle's business—selling second-hand clothes, small toys, and fancy items in Besant Road Market, Vijayawada. This decision allowed her to leverage existing community knowledge and business potential.

### **Navigating the Market: Growth and Learning**

Operating in a busy market posed both challenges and opportunities. Kiranmai adapted by:

- Managing peak-time sales and customer negotiations.
- Stocking seasonal items to boost sales during festivals.
- Expanding her product range based on customer preferences.
- Learning financial management and reinvesting in her business.

Her persistence helped her establish a steady income, providing financial stability for her family.

### **Balancing Family and Business Responsibilities**

Kiranmai's day begins early, ensuring her daughters are ready for school before setting up her market stall. Despite the exhaustion, she remains motivated by her children's smiles and the growing number of loyal customers.

### Challenges Faced

- Managing household duties while running a full-time business.
- Ensuring Srilatha receives the necessary educational support.
- Learning financial management for the first time.
- Dealing with fluctuations in market demand.

### Impact and Achievements

- **Economic Independence:** Regular earnings sustain her household.
- **Children's Education:** She funds her daughters' schooling, including private support for Srilatha.
- **Business Revival:** She restored a lost family trade, regaining financial stability and dignity.
- **Community Inspiration:** Her resilience serves as motivation for other women in similar situations.

### Future Aspirations

Kiranmai dreams of expanding her business, adding new products, and eventually supporting other women by creating employment opportunities.

### Ongoing Support and Monitoring

HELP and VIMUKTHI continue mentoring Kiranmai, connecting her with financial support, government schemes, and micro-enterprise opportunities to ensure sustainable growth.

### Conclusion: A Story of Resilience and Transformation

Unlike many livelihood initiatives that start from scratch, Kiranmai's journey is unique—she revived a family business, proving that restoring traditional trades can be a sustainable path to self-reliance. Her courage and determination have not only secured her children's future but also demonstrated that economic empowerment can break cycles of poverty and dependence. Her story is a testament to the power of community support, financial inclusion, and the indomitable spirit of women striving for a dignified life.

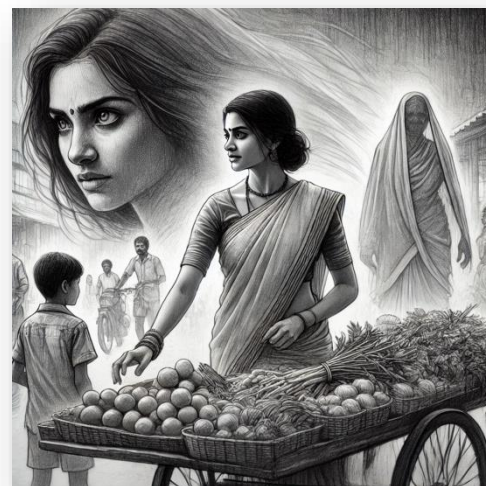
## ***"Sarala's Journey: From Fear to Freedom through Livelihood and Legal Empowerment"***

### Introduction

This case study highlights Sarala's inspiring journey, where legal empowerment and economic resilience intersected to restore her livelihood. It showcases how **HELP** and **VIMUKTHI** supported her in overcoming harassment and reviving her vegetable vending business, leading to financial stability and a secure future for her children.

### Background: Personal Struggles and Threats

Sarala (name changed), 24 years age a mother of two children from YSR Colony, Vijayawada, ran a small vegetable cart while her husband worked at a bag manufacturing unit. Her life took a distressing turn when an individual who once professed love turned into an abuser, blackmailing her for Rs. 1.5 lakh and threatening her and her children's safety. The constant fear caused extreme anxiety and sleepless nights.



***"This bitter episode caused me immense distress. I could endure it, but what about my innocent children?" – Sarala***

### Turning Point: Legal Support and Safety Restoration

As a VIMUKTHI Collective member for three years, Sarala confided in HELP's field team. The Project Coordinator escalated her case, leading to police intervention and a stern warning to the harasser. This step restored Sarala's sense of security and allowed her to focus on rebuilding her life.

### Reviving Livelihood: Expanding the Vegetable Business

With renewed confidence, Sarala rejoined her Self-Help Group (SHG), secured financial support, and reinvested in her vegetable vending business. She expanded her stock, improved quality, and sourced produce strategically from early morning markets.

***"Now, I sleep peacefully knowing I can feed my children with what I earn daily." – Sarala***

### Daily Business Operations and Family Balance

Sarala's daily routine involves balancing home duties, sourcing fresh vegetables, and selling at the market. She has developed negotiation skills, customer awareness, and strategic planning, ensuring her business remains profitable despite market fluctuations.



## Economic Stability and Future Growth

- **Daily earnings:** ~Rs. 500 (Monthly ~Rs. 12,000)
- **Contribution to family income:** Over 60%
- **Investment plans:** Expansion into fruit sales, a covered cart, and SHG savings
- **Long-term goal:** Scaling up by supplying residential communities and adding value-added products

## Impact on Family Well-being

With a steady income, Sarala ensures proper nutrition, education, and healthcare for her children. She enrolled her youngest child in private school, marking a significant milestone in her family's progress.

## Legal Empowerment: A Key Enabler

Sarala's journey highlights how addressing harassment through legal intervention was essential in sustaining her economic independence. This case underscores that women's protection is fundamental to their financial growth and stability.

## Ongoing Support and Community Safety

HELP and VIMUKTHI continue monitoring Sarala's progress, providing financial literacy, savings support, and protection through police follow-ups. Her case serves as a replicable model for empowering women facing violence and financial instability.

## Conclusion: A Holistic Approach to Empowerment

Sarala's story demonstrates the power of integrated support—legal action, financial assistance, and community solidarity. By reclaiming her safety and livelihood, she not only overcame adversity but set a precedent for other women to follow, proving that true empowerment is both legal and economic.

## "Justice Delivered- Survivors Access Victim Compensation"



## Breaking Barriers: Anjali's Fight for Justice and Compensation

### Background: The Struggle for Victim Compensation in India

India's victim compensation scheme, governed by the Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF) and implemented through District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs), aims to provide financial support to survivors of crime and exploitation. However, long processing times, bureaucratic hurdles, and lack of awareness prevent many survivors from accessing their entitled funds. Studies show that over 60% of survivors either do not apply or face significant delays in receiving compensation.



Anjali (name changed), a 22-year-old woman from Tellapadu, Prakasam District, is one such survivor. Her journey highlights both the challenges of the system and the power of persistence in securing justice.

### A Struggle for Justice

After being rescued from a life of exploitation, Anjali faced rejection from her family, social stigma, and bureaucratic hurdles in securing victim compensation. Though her past was behind her, she soon realized that survival required more than just escaping—it demanded resilience, persistence, and access to justice.

She often recalled the day she was told she was eligible for compensation. “It felt like a distant dream,” she admitted. “I had no idea where to start or whom to approach. The system felt impossible to navigate.”

### The Long Road to Compensation

Despite government provisions for victim compensation, Anjali found that accessing these funds was not easy. When she first applied for relief through the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), her claim was delayed due to missing documents and lack of legal guidance. Frustrated but determined, she sought help from VIMUKTI and HELP, two organizations advocating for survivors' rights. With the support of a project lawyer, she navigated legal complexities, attended hearings, and ensured her case was properly presented.



After months of struggle, her perseverance paid off—she was awarded Rs. 4 lakh in victim compensation, a financial lifeline that would allow her to rebuild her life. “The day I received the confirmation letter, I finally felt like justice was on my side,” she recalled.

A legal aid worker from HELP remarked, “Anjali’s case is a testament to the importance of persistence. Many survivors give up midway due to bureaucratic delays, but she fought for what was rightfully hers.”

### **Economic Stability Through Support**

With the compensation amount, Anjali took a bold step—she used a portion of it to start a small business making jute bags and bakery products. Her goal was not just to survive but to gain financial independence and ensure she never had to depend on others again.

Through VIMUKTI’s financial literacy programs, she learned how to manage her funds, reinvest profits, and expand her small enterprise. The initiative helped her connect with other survivors who had successfully transitioned to independent livelihoods. Seeing their success fueled her determination.

### **Overcoming Social Stigma**

Even as she built a new life, society was not quick to forget her past. Many in her village viewed survivors like her with suspicion, refusing to interact with or employ them. Her biggest heartbreak came when her own parents refused to accept her back home, fearing community judgment.

But Anjali refused to let stigma define her. Instead, she joined VIMUKTI as a mentor, helping other survivors navigate legal battles, financial challenges, and social reintegration. “I know what it feels like to be alone in this fight,” she says. “If I can guide even one woman toward justice and self-reliance, then my struggle was worth it.”

### **Advocacy and Future Aspirations**

Today, Anjali is not just a survivor—she is a leader in the movement for victim compensation and social entitlements. She actively participates in campaigns pushing for faster compensation disbursement, policy changes, and better support systems for survivors. Her fight has already helped three other survivors secure their compensation more efficiently, and she is determined to expand this impact further.

She no longer feels like a victim. Standing before a group of young women at a legal awareness session, she shares her story, watching their faces light up with hope. “This isn’t just about compensation,” she tells them. “It’s about reclaiming our lives.”

### **Key Challenges in the Victim Compensation Process**

Delays in application processing – Many survivors wait months or even years for approval.

Lack of legal knowledge – Without guidance, survivors struggle with paperwork and legal complexities.

Bureaucratic hurdles – Missing documents or misfiled cases often result in rejections.

Social stigma – Survivors fear speaking up due to shame and rejection from their communities.

### Lessons Learned and Impact

Access to justice requires persistence – Without legal aid and advocacy, many survivors would be denied compensation.

Financial independence empowers survivors – The ability to earn changes the way society perceives them.

Survivor-led initiatives are key to breaking stigma – When survivors help each other, they create lasting change.

### Policy Recommendations

- Streamlining the compensation process – Reduce processing time at DLSAs to ensure survivors receive aid faster.
- Increased awareness programs – Educate survivors on their rights and provide step-by-step guidance on applications.
- Legal aid expansion – Ensure every survivor has access to free legal representation to navigate the system.
- Support for financial sustainability – Provide skill training and microfinance options for survivors post-compensation.

### Conclusion: A Call to Action

Anjali's journey from victim to entrepreneur and advocate highlights the power of resilience, community support, and legal empowerment. Through her fight for compensation, she not only rebuilt her own life but also paved the way for others to do the same.

However, thousands of survivors across India still struggle to access their rightful compensation. Advocates, policymakers, and organizations must work together to simplify the legal process, reduce delays, and support survivors beyond financial aid.

Anjali hopes that one day, no survivor will have to struggle as she did—and that justice will come not as a privilege, but as a right for all.

## Navigating Hardship: Bhanupriya's Journey from Adversity to Empowerment

### 1. Overview and Purpose

This case study examines Bhanupriya's transformation from a background of profound socio-economic deprivation to her eventual legal empowerment and vocational rehabilitation. It analyzes the systemic challenges she faced, the multifaceted interventions that redirected her life, and the policy implications that emerge from her journey.



### 2. Early Life and Socioeconomic Background

Bhanupriya, a 25-year-old resident of Chirala, was born into a life marked by neglect and economic hardship. Her biological mother was involved in long-term commercial sex work, and her father, an alcoholic, contributed little to the family's welfare. Consequently, Bhanupriya was raised by a non-biological caregiver due to the negligence of her biological family. Her formal education ended after the third grade in a municipal school, forcing her to begin working as a daily laborer at an early age.

### 3. Marital Challenges and Economic Disempowerment

At the age of 14, driven by emotional vulnerability and limited options, Bhanupriya married a man named Balu. The relationship deteriorated rapidly as Balu engaged in extramarital affairs, succumbed to alcoholism, and failed to contribute economically. Facing abuse, financial exploitation, and suspicions regarding her character, Bhanupriya eventually separated from him while pregnant. Following her separation, she returned to her supportive stepmother who had been with her from the beginning.

### 4. Survival Strategies and Engagement in Informal Economies

Faced with the dual responsibilities of supporting her young child and her aging stepmother, Bhanupriya moved to Bangalore in search of better prospects. Under dire economic circumstances, she engaged in prostitution as a means to secure immediate financial resources. Later, with the assistance of her friend Vijaya Kumari, she returned to Chirala, where she continued to navigate the informal economy to sustain herself.

### 5. Legal Encounters and the Road to Rehabilitation

A significant turning point in Bhanupriya's life came in 2018, following a police raid in Ongole. During this event, she was apprehended and processed through the legal system. Subsequently, she was referred to a shelter home for rehabilitation and counseling—a nine-month period during which she received critical support to reframe her outlook and

rebuild her life. During her rehabilitation, she underwent vocational training in jute bag manufacturing, tailoring, embroidery, and bakery production. Additionally, she was eventually reintegrated with her biological mother, who resumed her role as a caregiver, thereby strengthening her support system.

## **6. Pathway to Legal Support and Victim Compensation**

Bhanupriya's trajectory took a decisive turn when she became involved with the Leadership Next Programme. Through this initiative, she learned about the state-sponsored victim compensation scheme. With dedicated guidance from a project lawyer associated with VIMUKTHI, she navigated the intricate legal processes and persistently followed up with the District Legal Services Authority. This sustained effort resulted in a formal decision:

**"Finally, on 27th Feb 2021 Bhanupriya has been awarded with an amount of Rs. 1 lakh as victim compensation by DLSA – Prakasam District."**

Reflecting on her transformation and the support received, she added:

**"I have joined VIMUKTHI and built with a sense of courage and confidence towards my life. Now, I got a source to try my best to nourish my son for his blossom future in the form of this compensation. I thank VIMUKTHI mainly our project lawyer."**

## **7. Critical Analysis and Future Prospects**

Bhanupriya's current engagement as a daily wage laborer in a small-scale cashew nut processing unit in Chirala is a testament to her resilience, even as it highlights the persistent limitations of the support systems she has navigated. Key challenges identified include:

**Bureaucratic Delays:** Prolonged administrative procedures hinder timely access to compensation.

**Vocational Limitations:** There remains a need for ongoing skill development to ensure sustainable economic independence.

**Social Stigma:** Deep-rooted societal biases continue to impede full reintegration, despite legal and rehabilitative interventions.

Her experience serves as a potent illustration of how targeted legal aid and vocational training can transform lives, while also calling attention to systemic gaps that require policy intervention.

## **8. Strategic Policy Recommendations**

- Drawing upon Bhanupriya's journey, the following policy measures are recommended:



- **Streamline Compensation Processes:** Reform administrative protocols to reduce delays and ensure prompt disbursement of funds.
- **Enhance Legal Aid Access:** Expand and improve legal support services to help vulnerable populations navigate complex legal frameworks.
- **Invest in Vocational Training:** Broaden access to comprehensive skill development initiatives that create sustainable pathways to economic independence.
- **Develop Integrated Support Networks:** Establish holistic systems addressing legal, psychological, and economic challenges to promote complete rehabilitation.

## 9. Conclusion: Empowerment through Transformation

Bhanupriya's journey—from enduring early-life hardships and navigating marital and economic challenges to achieving legal restitution and vocational empowerment—exemplifies the transformative impact of coordinated support systems. Her story highlights the critical role of accessible legal aid, targeted vocational training, and comprehensive policy reforms in fostering personal resilience and rebuilding lives. Continued efforts to address the systemic challenges she faced are essential to ensure that justice and support become a guaranteed right for all survivors.

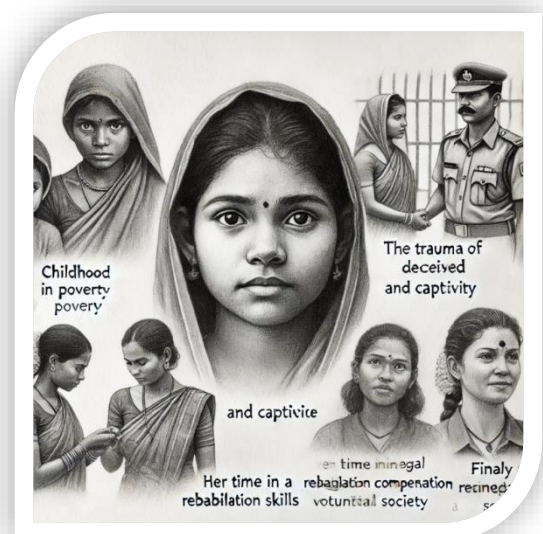
## From Darkness to Dignity: Parvathi's Journey of Survival and Justice

## 1. Overview and Purpose

This case study explores the traumatic experiences of Parvathi (Name changed), a 22 years old young woman from a marginalized background, who was subjected to sexual abuse and trafficking at a very tender age of 14 years old. It highlights her journey through legal battles, rehabilitation, and eventual empowerment, providing insights into systemic challenges and the role of victim compensation in restoring dignity and hope.

## 2. Early Life and Socioeconomic Background

Parvathi is from a Scheduled Caste family, grew up in poverty in Prakasam District. She studied up to the 9th standard at HCM Girls High School, Ongole, and resided in the school's hostel. Her father worked as a construction laborer, while her mother was a daily wage worker. Despite financial hardships, she enjoyed her education and time with friends.



### 3. Marital Challenges and Economic Disempowerment

As a young girl, Parvathifaced vulnerabilities common to many children from impoverished backgrounds. Limited family support and economic instability exposed her to potential dangers, as she had minimal protection against external threats. Her life took a tragic turn when she was deceived and subjected to sexual violence, altering her future dramatically.

### 4. Survival Strategies and Engagement in Informal Economies

After being sexually abused by a distant relative, Parvathisought refuge at her home. However, conflicts with her mother led her to return to Ongole, where she was deceived by an auto driver and trafficked into a brothel. She was coerced into sexual exploitation until she was rescued by the Ongole Rural Police in July 2015. With the intervention of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), she was placed in Asha Sadan Home, where she received care and protection.

### 5. Legal Encounters and the Road to Rehabilitation

The CWC promptly recorded Parvathi's statement under Section 164(5) CrPC and instructed the police to file an FIR under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA). She remained in Asha Sadan for four years, where she received counseling, completed her 10th standard education, and gained vocational skills in jute bag-making and bakery products.

### 6. Pathway to Legal Support and Victim Compensation

Parvathiwas introduced to the concept of victim compensation through a legal awareness meeting conducted by a project lawyer from the LNP Programme. Initially skeptical, she was encouraged by the project lawyer and supported by VIMUKTHI leaders. With continuous legal assistance, she navigated the complex application process, attended hearings, and met with the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA). On 23rd March 2020, she successfully obtained an interim compensation of Rs. 4 lakh.

***“Nothing can truly compensate for the years I lost, but the support I received gave me a new hope to rebuild my life.”— Parvathi***

### 7. Critical Analysis and Future Prospects

Parvathi's case underscores critical gaps in child protection, rehabilitation, and legal redress for trafficking survivors. While compensation provided financial relief, it cannot replace the years of suffering. However, the support from legal aid programs, shelter homes, and survivor-led organizations like VIMUKTHI played a crucial role in her reintegration into society.

### 8. Strategic Policy Recommendations

- **Strengthening Institutional Support:** Enhanced collaboration between CWC, law enforcement, and rehabilitation centers to ensure seamless support for survivors.
- **Legal and Financial Assistance:** Expedited victim compensation processes with dedicated legal aid for survivors.

- **Economic Empowerment:** Sustainable livelihood programs to equip survivors with skills for financial independence.
- **Community Engagement:** Strengthening survivor-led initiatives like VIMUKTHI to provide peer support and advocacy.

### **9. Conclusion: Empowerment through Transformation**

Parvathi's journey from victimization to empowerment exemplifies the resilience of trafficking survivors when supported by a robust legal and social framework. Her story highlights the importance of victim compensation, rehabilitation programs, and community-based support in enabling survivors to reclaim their lives. Today, she is married and living a dignified life, a testament to the impact of strategic interventions and survivor-centric policies.

## "Freedom from Bondage: Survivor Journeys Beyond Debt"



Or





## The Hidden Crisis: Women, Debt, and Survival

### Introduction

Debt traps have become a silent crisis, ensnaring countless women in cycles of financial distress, social stigma, and exploitation. With informal lending networks charging exorbitant interest rates, many vulnerable women fall deeper into debt, facing relentless harassment and extreme hardship. This case study follows the journey of **Srivalli** (name changed), a woman who not only battled overwhelming debt but also emerged as a community leader, driving systemic change and advocating for financial justice.

### The Harsh Reality of Debt Traps

For many women in low-income communities, borrowing from private lenders is the only option to cover emergencies, medical expenses, or daily survival. However, with interest rates as high as 10–50% per month, repayment becomes impossible, leading to a vicious cycle of borrowing and repayment. In extreme cases, lenders use intimidation, physical violence, and public humiliation to recover their money, leaving women with little hope of escape.

### Srivalli's Descent into Debt

Srivalli, a 28-year-old woman from a rural village in Andhra Pradesh, grew up in poverty. With limited education, she married at 15, believing it would bring stability. However, her husband's meager earnings as a daily laborer were insufficient to support their two children. When he fell ill and was unable to work, Srivalli had no choice but to take a loan of ₹60,000 from a private lender for medical expenses.

Struggling to repay, she borrowed from another lender to cover the first loan. This cycle continued until her debt ballooned to ₹3.5 lakh. "I was not much terrified of even COVID and other issues at that time. But I was mentally no more because of the debt trap that I had entangled," she lamented.

As lenders grew impatient, they began harassing Srivalli at her home, humiliating her in front of neighbors, and issuing threats. "I died with shy for getting scolded with bitter words by the money lender who asked me to sleep with more customers to pay her interest in front of my daughters more than in presence of my tenants," Srivalli recalled, her voice heavy with shame and anger. Sometimes, she was forced to pay double the interest as a penalty. "The money lender was abusing





me and also threatening me that they will call the police and inform about my work.” Her children, witnessing the constant threats, became anxious and fearful. “I remember my son asking, ‘Will they take our home away, Amma?’ That question broke me,” Srivalli recalls. The emotional toll was unbearable, leading to sleepless nights and deep anxiety.

### **The Turning Point: Fighting Back**

A women’s self-help group in her village connected Srivalli with VIMUKTI, an organization assisting women facing financial crises. She attended their workshops on legal rights and financial management, where she discovered that many of the lender’s practices were illegal. Encouraged by her newfound knowledge, she sought legal help.

With the support of HELP-VIMUKTI, Srivalli filed a formal complaint against the lenders and accessed victim compensation. She also enrolled in tailoring and embroidery training to establish a sustainable income. Legal action helped reduce the intimidation from lenders, and she found strength through a supportive network of women who had faced similar struggles.

### **Rebuilding and Leading the Fight Against Debt Traps**

Over time, Srivalli repaid her loans and regained control of her finances. Through vocational training, she started a small business, stitching garments for local markets. Her earnings ensured her children’s education and a stable home.

Inspired by her journey, Srivalli went beyond personal recovery—she became an activist fighting against financial exploitation. She personally guided several women in filing legal complaints against predatory lenders and mobilized community members to protest against illegal lending practices. “I am working hard and earning money which can be made best use of for my survival, but paying back my loans is challenging where I have the responsibilities of my two girl children,” she shared.

Srivalli also helped organize large-scale skill development programs, enabling more women to gain financial independence. She worked closely with community leaders to set up an alternative low-interest lending system, ensuring women had access to fair credit options without falling into the hands of moneylenders.

One of the women Srivalli mentored, Sita, was trapped in a similar debt cycle. Under Srivalli’s guidance, she learned financial planning and secured a loan through a self-help group, allowing her to start a small food business. Today, Sita is self-sufficient and helping others. “Srivalli gave me hope when I had none,” she says.

### **Impact and Community Transformation**

Srivalli’s advocacy has helped over 50 women in her village gain financial independence. She played a key role in forming a community savings group, offering low-interest loans as an alternative to private lenders. Her work has also attracted attention from local policymakers, urging stricter regulations on informal lending.

#### **Her efforts led to:**

- The establishment of financial literacy programs for women in neighboring villages.

- Successful intervention in multiple debt harassment cases, protecting vulnerable women from exploitation.
- The development of a women's cooperative, creating an independent, community-driven financial support system.
- Policy discussions with local authorities, advocating for better financial protection measures for women.
- A regional campaign to regulate informal lenders, gaining media attention and community support.

### **Lessons and Policy Recommendations**

#### **Srivalli's journey highlights the need for:**

- Stronger legal action against predatory lenders.
- Microfinance options with fair interest rates for women in crisis.
- Mandatory financial education for vulnerable communities.
- Expansion of women's self-help groups to provide economic alternatives.
- Greater access to victim compensation programs for women facing financial coercion.
- Government-backed social entrepreneurship initiatives to create sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- Stronger enforcement of lending regulations to prevent future financial exploitation.

More grassroots leadership programs to empower women to take collective action against illegal lending.

### **Future Aspirations: A Movement for Change**

Srivalli now dreams of expanding her business and creating more employment opportunities for women in her village. She is working towards setting up a training center for skill development, where women can learn tailoring, embroidery, and financial management. But beyond this, she envisions a women-led financial network that will permanently reduce dependence on predatory lenders. "I want to ensure that no woman in my community ever feels as helpless as I once did," she says.

She has also begun working with regional NGOs and legal aid groups to push for stricter lending laws, ensuring that future generations of women do not fall into the same trap. Her next goal is to expand financial literacy programs to neighboring districts, making debt awareness an integral part of community education.

### **Conclusion: From Survivor to Changemaker**

Srivalli's story is not just about personal survival—it is about transforming an entire community. From being trapped in debt to leading change, she proves that financial freedom is possible with the right support. By sharing her experience, she hopes to inspire other women to fight against financial exploitation and reclaim their lives. She envisions a future where no woman falls prey to debt traps, and financial independence becomes a reality for all.

"We must stand together—no woman should face this battle alone. The fight against debt exploitation is just beginning."

## Breaking Free: Escaping the Debt Trap – The Story of Durga

### Introduction

Debt traps have devastated the lives of many women, forcing them into cycles of financial distress, exploitation, and social stigma. According to a 2022 report by the Reserve Bank of India, nearly **55% of low-income households** rely on informal lending, with **interest rates ranging from 10% to 50% per month**. Women, particularly those in precarious social and economic conditions, are disproportionately affected. This case study follows the journey of Durga, a survivor who struggled under the weight of debt and found a path to financial independence and dignity.



### The Reality of Debt Traps

In many parts of India, women in financially vulnerable positions are easy targets for **private money lenders** who operate outside legal frameworks. These lenders often impose extreme interest rates, leading to **cycles of indebtedness** that are nearly impossible to escape. This results in severe **mental stress, family breakdowns, and in extreme cases, suicide attempts**. Durga's story exemplifies this harsh reality.

### Durga's Struggle with Debt

Durga, a **32-year-old woman from Chilakaluripet**, lost her parents at a young age and was raised by her aunt, who prioritized her own children over Durga. Without parental care, Durga grew up without guidance or protection. She was married off young but soon found herself in a toxic relationship with an **abusive husband** who introduced her to alcohol and exploitation. When he abandoned her, she was left to fend for herself and her six-year-old daughter.

The **COVID-19 lockdown** made survival even harder. With no work and no financial support, Durga had no choice but to **borrow Rs. 75,000 from a private money lender** at an exorbitant interest rate. "I borrowed just to keep my child fed, but soon, the debt became unbearable. Every four or five days, lenders would show up at my house, demanding their interest," she recalled. The threats escalated—she was **forced out of her rented home**, her belongings were thrown onto the street, and she was physically assaulted by a lender in front of her neighbors. With no escape, she attempted suicide twice. "I had lost everything—my home, my dignity, my will to live. The only thing that kept me going was the thought of my daughter's future."

### Timeline of Durga's Struggle and Recovery

- **2018:** Husband abandons her; left alone with her daughter.

- **2019:** Starts working as a domestic laborer, earning a minimal income.
- **2020:** COVID-19 lockdowns lead to job loss. Takes a **loan of Rs. 75,000** from a private lender.
- **2021:** Faces repeated harassment from money lenders. **Attempted suicide twice.**
- **2022:** Introduced to VIMUKTI and HELP, begins receiving legal and emotional support.
- **2023:** Starts vocational training in flower decoration and repays part of her debt.
- **2024:** Advocates for financial literacy for other women through VIMUKTI.

## Finding Support and Strength

Durga's turning point came when she was introduced to **VIMUKTI**, a state-level forum supporting survivors of trafficking and financial exploitation. She attended their **counseling sessions**, where she found comfort and solidarity with other women who had endured similar struggles. "They told me that I was not alone—that others had suffered like me but had found a way forward. That gave me the strength to fight."

Through **VIMUKTI and HELP**, Durga learned about her legal rights and how to deal with aggressive money lenders. HELP assisted her in **seeking victim compensation and legal aid**, helping her challenge unlawful interest rates. Most importantly, the organization helped her secure a **safe space for her daughter in a hostel**, ensuring her education was not interrupted. "Knowing that my daughter was safe and in school gave me the motivation to keep fighting," she said.

Durga also benefited from **community support programs**, where she met other women who had faced similar struggles. "Hearing their stories, I realized I wasn't the only one. We all carried the same scars, but together, we were stronger," she recalled.

A staff member from VIMUKTI shared, *"Durga showed incredible determination to break free from her struggles. She actively participated in every training session and never hesitated to ask questions about legal aid and financial planning. She is now a role model for many other women in similar situations."*

Similarly, a HELP representative stated, *"Many women like Durga don't know that they have rights and options. Our goal is to ensure they receive victim compensation, legal protection, and pathways to financial stability. Durga's transformation is a powerful example of how access to the right resources can change lives."*

## Overcoming the Debt Trap

Determined to rebuild her life, Durga attended **vocational training workshops** through VIMUKTI and HELP. She learned flower decoration and slowly began earning a steady income. "Every rupee I earn now is a step away from the debt that once crushed me. I no longer feel helpless," she shared with pride.

Her newfound independence gave her the **confidence to stand up to the money lenders** who once terrorized her. With the backing of VIMUKTI, HELP, and legal support, she resisted their unlawful demands and gradually paid off portions of her debt. The harassment

lessened, and for the first time in years, she felt a sense of control over her own life. However, **her debt is not yet fully cleared**, but she remains hopeful and determined to repay the remaining amount in the coming months. “I can finally see a future where I am debt-free,” she said.

Now, Durga is not only financially stable but has also become a **mentor for other women** facing similar challenges. “I know what it feels like to have nowhere to turn. If I can help just one woman break free from this cycle, then my struggle was not in vain.”

### Community Impact

Durga’s advocacy through VIMUKTI and HELP has led to:

- **Financial literacy sessions** that have reached over 50 women in her community.
- **Legal workshops** that help women understand their rights against exploitative lending.
- **Support groups** where women can share experiences and find solutions together.

Her story has inspired other women to seek **alternative livelihoods**, breaking away from the cycle of debt and dependency on money lenders.

### Policy Insights and Recommendations

Durga’s experience highlights the urgent need for **stronger laws against predatory lending and financial exploitation**. Some key policy recommendations include:

- **Regulation of Private Money Lending:** State governments should implement stricter controls on private lending practices.
- **Microfinance Options:** Expanding **low-interest microfinance loans** for women in crisis to prevent reliance on illegal lenders.
- **Financial Literacy Programs:** Educating vulnerable communities on **debt management and financial planning**.
- **Survivor-Led Initiatives:** Expanding groups like **VIMUKTI and HELP** to more districts, ensuring survivors support others in similar situations.
- **Social Welfare Expansion:** Strengthening access to government aid, including housing schemes and education support for children of single mothers.

### Future Aspirations

Looking ahead, Durga hopes to:

- **Establish a self-help group** for women facing financial hardship.
- **Expand financial education workshops** in surrounding villages.
- **Support her daughter’s higher education** so she never has to endure the same struggles.

“I want my daughter to grow up knowing that no woman should suffer in silence. If we lift each other up, we can break this cycle for good.”



## Conclusion

Durga's story is a **testament to resilience and the power of community support**. Though the path out of debt was difficult, with guidance and economic opportunities, she is now reclaiming her life. Her journey is an inspiration to other women trapped in cycles of debt, proving that **empowerment and dignity are possible, even in the darkest of times**. She hopes that by sharing her story, other women in similar situations will find the strength to fight back and take control of their lives.

## From Shadows to Strength: Prameela's Journey of Hope

### A Life of Hardships and Responsibilities

Prameela, (name changed) a 26-year-old from Vijayawada, was thrust into adulthood early. Her father's death left her family in financial distress, leading to her marriage at just 14. Initially, her husband was supportive, but after the birth of their second daughter, he turned abusive. Eventually, he abandoned Prameela, leaving her to care for her children, mother, grandmother, and younger brother alone.

### Caught in a Debt Trap

With no stable income, Prameela resorted to borrowing from private moneylenders at exorbitant interest rates. One loan led to another, and soon, her debt spiraled to ₹5 lakh. Harassment from lenders became relentless, with public humiliation adding to her mental distress.

### Exploitation in the Name of Survival

At her lowest point, Prameela was lured into prostitution under the false promise of easy money. Trapped by circumstances, she remained in the trade under coercion until a police rescue placed her in a shelter home. However, her struggles didn't end—she faced renewed financial exploitation upon returning home.



### A Turning Point: Finding VIMUKTHI

Through local support, Prameela connected with HELP-VIMUKTHI, an organization empowering survivors of trafficking. She hesitated initially but gradually gained confidence through workshops and training. With their help, she secured a hostel for her daughters, ensuring their safety and education.

### Rising as a Leader

Determined to help others escape similar fates, Prameela became an active leader in VIMUKTHI. She now supports victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, advocating for their rights and economic empowerment.

### **The Road Ahead: A Dream of Independence**

Despite ongoing financial struggles, Prameela remains resilient. She aspires to start a small tailoring unit, creating employment opportunities for other women. “I want to build something my daughters can be proud of,” she says.

### **Key Lessons**

- Debt entrapment leads to financial and emotional devastation.
- Timely intervention through legal aid and financial literacy is critical.
- Survivor-led collectives empower women to reclaim control over their lives.
- Education for children breaks cycles of poverty and exploitation.

### **Recommendations for Action**

- Expand access to low-interest microloans to prevent debt-based exploitation.
- Strengthen emergency funds and victim compensation mechanisms.
- Recognize survivor-led organizations like VIMUKTHI in policy planning.
- Invest in sustainable livelihood programs for survivors.

### **Conclusion: From Debt to Economic Freedom**

Prameela journey is a testament to resilience and the power of collective support. From being a victim of debt bondage to a leader advocating for change, her story underscores the urgent need for systemic interventions.

“Debt may have chained my hands, but knowledge unlocked the door. Today, I stand not as a survivor but as a woman walking steadily toward freedom—for myself, my children, and every sister still shackled by poverty.” – Prameela

Her fight continues, but her story is already a beacon of hope, proving that economic liberation is possible when dignity is prioritized.

## **Dancing Through Shadows: Thrisha’s Journey from Exploitation to Empowerment**

### **A Dream Turned Nightmare**

“I love dancing,” says Thrisha,(name changed) 21 years, from Chilakaluripet, Guntur District. Orphaned at a young age, she grew up in a government hostel, dreaming of a future where she could dance freely.



However, poverty and betrayal led her into a harsh reality where dance became a tool of exploitation.

*"They tried to turn my dance into chains, but I will make it my wings. I won't just survive—I will rise and dance freely for myself and my son."* — Thrisha

### **Trapped by a Trusted Face:**

At 17, a woman named Sarojini deceived Thrisha with gifts and false promises, only to sell her for ₹2 lakhs to a family involved in both dance and prostitution. Though she performed at village events, pressure to enter prostitution soon followed. Thrisha resisted, enduring two years of relentless coercion.

### **The Debt Trap: A Cycle of Despair:**

To escape, Thrisha was forced to take a high-interest loan to repay the family. Seeking emotional support, she lived with a man who exploited her income. Later, she had a son from another relationship, but mounting debts and moneylender harassment pushed her to the brink of suicide.

### **A Ray of Hope: Support from VIMUKTHI:**

Thrisha's turning point came when she found VIMUKTHI, a collective supporting survivors of trafficking. Through its meetings, training sessions, and emotional support, she regained confidence and a renewed sense of purpose.

### **Reclaiming Dance as Liberation:**

Determined to redefine her future, Thrisha now dreams of making dance her livelihood—not a tool of exploitation but one of empowerment. Her goal is to build a dignified life for herself and her son, ensuring he never faces the struggles she endured.

### **Lessons for Social Change**

- Debt traps go beyond finances; they crush dignity and self-worth.
- Holistic support, including legal aid and sustainable livelihoods, is essential.
- Linking survivor skills (e.g., dance, arts) to dignified employment fosters true empowerment.
- Education support for survivors' children breaks cycles of exploitation.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Expand low-interest emergency loans to reduce reliance on private lenders.
- Create survivor-centered livelihood programs aligned with their skills.
- Strengthen community-led initiatives like VIMUKTHI for localized support.
- Ensure access to childcare, education, and legal protection for survivors.

### **Conclusion: From Chains of Debt to the Stage of Freedom:**

Thrisha's journey is not just about survival—it's about reclaiming power. From being sold into bondage to standing on the threshold of a new beginning, she is determined to rewrite her story.

***"Debt pushed me into darkness, but I refuse to let it define me. My son will see me dance—not to survive, but to live free." — Thrisha***

Her story is a testament that economic freedom is a right, not a privilege. With the right support, survivors like Thrisha can break free from their past and step into a future of dignity, choice, and strength.

No Borders, No Mercy: Swathi's Fight Against a Debt That Crossed Oceans

***"They say borders protect nations. But when debt crosses oceans, no border can protect a woman like me." — Swathi***

A Debt That Knew No Boundaries

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while the world feared a virus, Swathi feared something worse—debt. Her younger brother, stranded in Saudi Arabia without money or a passport, was starving.

***"I didn't think twice. I had to bring my brother back, no matter the cost,"***Swathi recalls. She borrowed ₹55,000 from private lenders, believing she was saving her family. Instead, she had unknowingly stepped into a cycle of financial ruin.



When Gold and Dignity Were Lost

To repay the loan, Swathi mortgaged her last piece of gold, but the debt only grew. Each month, lenders came, demanding payments with insults. Her younger brother dropped out of school to work as a laborer, earning just ₹50 a day—barely enough for a meal.

***"People looked at us like beggars. Even our relatives stopped visiting. It felt like the entire village knew we were drowning."***

Finding Courage in Her Voice

When VIMUKTHI, a survivor-led collective, approached her, Swathi realized she was not alone. She stood up in a meeting and declared:

***"Debt shackled my hands, but it cannot silence my voice."***

## From Borrowing to Building Solutions

Swathi refuses to let another woman suffer as she did. She now dreams of establishing a survivor-led debt relief center—not as charity, but as a financial safety net to protect women from exploitation.

***"I don't want any woman to choose between feeding her child and losing her dignity."***

### Lessons That Must Be Heard

- Cross-border migration often leads women into hidden debt traps.
- Survivor-led financial solutions restore dignity and empowerment.
- Livelihood programs must ensure sustainable income, not just skill training.
- Crisis relief must include debt protection and legal aid.

## From Debt's Prisoner to a Community's Voice

Swathi's journey proves that true freedom is not just escaping debt but building systems that prevent it.

***"I was buried under debt, but I chose to rise. Today, I speak not just for myself but for every woman silenced by loans, shame, and fear. Freedom isn't just survival—it's the power to decide what happens next."***

Her fight now echoes beyond her home—into villages, policy rooms, and the hearts of all who have known the weight of borrowed money and the fear of never breaking free.

## ***"From Debt and Despair to Dignity and Strength: Jyothi's Fight for Freedom"***

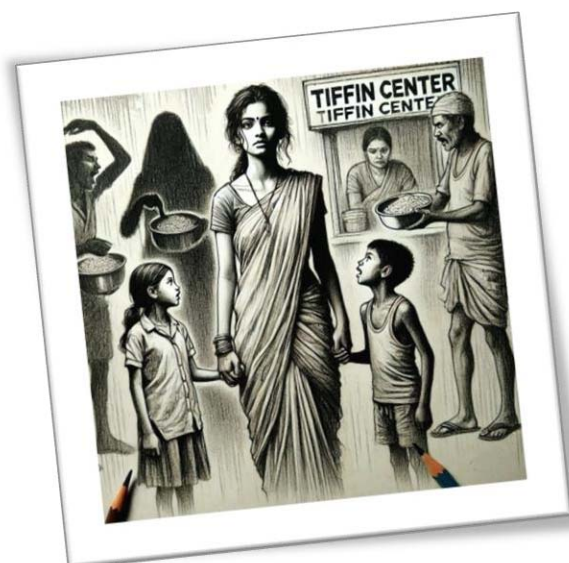
### *A Childhood Stolen, A Life of Struggle*

"I was just 14 when I got married, thinking I'd have a family to love. Instead, it was the beginning of my suffering."

At 27, Jyothi now bears the weight of raising two children alone, abandoned by her husband and trapped in a cycle of debt and exploitation.

#### *Debt: A Silent Predator*

Forced into daily-wage labor with no financial security, Jyothi borrowed money just to feed her children. But with exorbitant interest rates, the





debt only grew.

"I earned just enough to pay the interest. The principal never reduced—it kept growing like poison," she recalls.

#### *A Desperate Choice, A Cruel Betrayal*

A woman promised her quick money through prostitution. With no options, Jyothi gave in but felt immense guilt.

"When my husband found out, he abandoned me. Another man entered my life, but when he lost his job, he too left. I was alone again."

#### *Harassment and Fear: Debt's Brutal Grip*

As COVID-19 worsened her situation, she borrowed ₹1.5 lakh to survive.

"Moneylenders came to my home, abused me, locked my house, and threatened to file a police case. I was humiliated in front of my neighbors."

#### *A Ray of Hope: Finding VIMUKTHI*

Jyothi's turning point came when VIMUKTHI members stepped in. They ensured her children's safety by enrolling them in a hostel and provided her with emotional and legal support.

"They listened without judgment. They gave me hope when I had none."

#### *A Dream Beyond Survival*

With newfound strength, Jyothi now dreams of starting a small tiffin center. "I want to stand on my own feet, not depend on anyone. I want my children to study and be strong."

#### *Key Lessons & Policy Needs*

- Regulate private lending to protect vulnerable women from harassment.
- Promote survivor-led economic initiatives for sustainable employment.
- Strengthen legal, financial, and emotional support systems.
- Ensure educational security for children of survivors.

#### *Conclusion: From Survival to Self-Reliance*

"I don't want to die like this. My children should see that their mother stood up and built a life with dignity."

Jyothi's journey is not just about overcoming hardship—it's about reclaiming power. With HELP and VIMUKTHI's support, she's no longer a victim. She's a survivor, a fighter, and a woman determined to rewrite her future.

## "Journey from Survivors to Leaders":



**Stones to My Success**  
**An Iconic Expedition of Saraswathi**

**Courage and Confidence: The Stepping**

"I am proud to be a leader of VIMUKTHI, a survivors' collective representing nearly 500 victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and trafficking survivors across Andhra Pradesh. With the learning and support from HELP and VIMUKTHI, I have grown into a strong advocate and now shoulder the responsibility of serving as the President of VIMUKTHI." – Saraswathi, a 29-year-old survivor from Yerrabalem, Mangalagiri Mandal, Guntur District.

### **Early Life and Struggles**

Saraswathi,(name changed) along with her elder brothers, was orphaned and raised by a kind-hearted couple, Balayya and Bhagyamma, who worked as daily wage laborers. Due to financial difficulties and her guardians' reluctance toward education, she dropped out in the 9th standard. Seeking to build a future for herself, she enrolled in a missionary hostel to learn tailoring while hoping to continue her education. However, in the middle of her training, her maternal aunt and uncle forcibly brought her back and arranged her marriage at the age of 15 to Sundarayya in 2017. Feeling helpless and unsupported, Saraswathi had no choice but to comply.

### **Marital Abuse and Betrayal**

After giving birth to two daughters, Saraswathi faced severe discrimination from her husband's family, who blamed her for bringing a "burden" upon them. Her husband engaged in extramarital affairs, consumed alcohol excessively, and subjected her to physical and mental abuse. Even after giving birth to a son, her suffering did not end. Instead, her husband abandoned her completely and lived with another woman for months at a time.

One day, her torment escalated when her husband and in-laws accused her of infidelity, physically assaulted her, and expelled her from the house, forcibly keeping her three children. Seeking refuge, Saraswathi turned to her biological parents, only to be met with rejection under the influence of her aunt. With nowhere to go, she found work as a hospital housekeeper, earning a meager weekly wage of Rs. 1200, which she was forced to hand over to her mother to secure a place to stay.

### **Desperation and Survival**

Facing ongoing abuse and financial struggles, Saraswathi eventually left her parental home and moved to Guntur. She took a job as a salesgirl in a mobile shop, but the pain of being separated from her children haunted her. When she contacted her husband, his family demanded a divorce in exchange for allowing her to see her children. Feeling powerless, she agreed, but later sought legal intervention. In a landmark decision, the High Court ruled in her favor, granting her custody of all three children, as the girls required maternal care and the boy was too young to be deprived of his mother's presence.

With three children depending on her, Saraswathi had to find a way to survive. Lacking formal education and vocational skills, she struggled to secure stable employment. In dire circumstances, she was introduced to sex work by a friend, who assured her it would provide quick financial relief. With no alternatives, she reluctantly entered the trade to sustain her family's basic needs.

## **Turning Point: HELP and VIMUKTHI's Intervention**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought even greater hardships. With no income, Saraswathi and her children starved for days. Occasionally, charitable organizations provided food, but she often had to beg from tenants. Amidst this crisis, her friend Prabhavathi introduced her to VIMUKTHI and HELP. Initially, she attended community meetings and leadership training sessions simply for the food provided. However, over time, she realized the immense support and empowerment these organizations offered.

Under HELP and VIMUKTHI's guidance, Saraswathi received training in leadership, advocacy, financial literacy, legal rights, organizational management, and networking. She learned about anti-trafficking laws, policies, and victim support schemes. Her dedication and growth led her to become an active leader, and in 2022, she was elected as the President of VIMUKTHI.

## **Advocacy for Systemic Change**

Saraswathi's leadership came into full force when she faced discrimination while trying to enroll her children in school. The headmaster insisted on providing her ex-husband's credentials, disregarding her vulnerable situation. Realizing that many survivors faced similar challenges, she raised the issue with HELP and the VIMUKTHI board. With their collective efforts, they submitted a representation to the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, which further escalated the matter to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in New Delhi. As a result, the Andhra Pradesh State School Education Department issued directions ensuring that trafficked survivors and sex workers were not required to provide their husbands' credentials for school admissions—an incredible victory for VIMUKTHI.

## **Current Status and Achievements**

Today, Saraswathi is a driving force behind VIMUKTHI, working on fundraising initiatives to expand its services across Andhra Pradesh with mentorship from HELP. She sustains her family by making flower garlands with four other VIMUKTHI leaders. Her determination and advocacy have earned her widespread recognition:

- **Appointment to the Regional Postal Department's Internal Complaints Committee** under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013.
- **Participation in National and International Conferences** on issues affecting trafficking survivors and victims of CSE.

## **A Beacon of Hope**

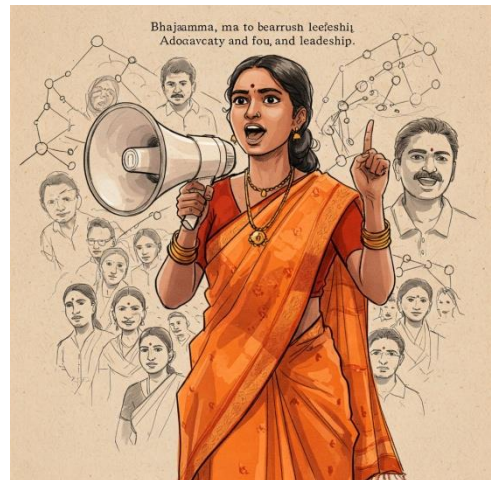
Saraswathi's journey—from forced marriage and abuse to becoming a resilient leader—is a testament to the power of courage, confidence, and collective support. Through HELP and VIMUKTHI, she has not only rebuilt her life but has also become an advocate for others, ensuring that no survivor walks the path of recovery alone.

## Bhajamma's Journey: From Betrayal to Empowerment

### Abandoned and Exploited: A Mother's Struggle

Bhajamma (name changed), a 37-year-old mother from Martur, Prakasam District, was left to fend for her two children after her husband abandoned them. Struggling with financial hardship, she fell into a deceptive relationship with Srinu, a man who initially promised support but later subjected her to psychological abuse and financial exploitation. When she finally forced him out of her home, he retaliated with threats, using her children's safety against her.

*"I was trapped in fear and isolation, but I knew I had to protect my children."* – Bhajamma



### Finding Strength: HELP and VIMUKTHI's Support

Determined to break free, Bhajamma sought support from **HELP** and **VIMUKTHI**, organizations aiding survivors of violence. VIMUKTHI (survivors collective) provided emotional and legal support, while HELP guided her in filing a police complaint. Taking this step not only ensured her safety but also set an example for other women in her community.

*"VIMUKTHI stood by me when no one else did."* – Bhajamma

### Rebuilding Life: Economic Independence and Advocacy

With VIMUKTHI's support, Bhajamma trained in tailoring and small-scale entrepreneurship, securing financial independence. HELP connected her to government financial aid programs, allowing her to build a stable income for her children. Empowered by her experiences, she began advocating for other survivors, raising awareness about legal rights and financial empowerment.

### Leadership and Community Impact

Bhajamma emerged as a leader, forming a **self-help group (SHG)** to support survivors of domestic violence. With HELP and VIMUKTHI's backing, she worked to improve legal protections and access to welfare programs. She also engaged with local authorities, ensuring faster responses to cases of abuse.

### Challenges and Breaking Barriers

Despite facing societal stigma and threats, Bhajamma remained determined. With HELP and VIMUKTHI by her side, she continued her fight against domestic violence, inspiring other women to stand up for their rights.



## Impact and Change

- **5+ women** sought legal assistance after hearing her story.
- **3 survivors** successfully filed complaints against their abusers.
- **10 women** received financial guidance through vocational training.
- **Local authorities** improved response times for domestic violence cases.

## Conclusion: A Legacy of Strength

Bhajamma's journey exemplifies resilience and the power of survivor-led movements. With HELP and VIMUKTHI's support, she transformed from a victim to a changemaker, proving that survivors can rise—not just to survive, but to lead.

*"No woman should suffer in silence. When we rise together, we create change."* – Bhajamma

## Resilience Redefined: Chitti's Stand for Dignity and Family Restoration

### A Childhood Marked by Struggle

Chitti (name changed), from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, grew up witnessing her mother's life as a sex worker. Determined to escape that path, she married Eswar Kumar at 16, hoping for a stable family life. For three years, she lived that dream with her husband and two children—until it started to fall apart.

### Domestic Violence and Emotional Abuse

Eswar's growing alcohol addiction turned their home into a battleground of insults, beatings, and humiliation, often fueled by his family. Chitti endured it in silence, holding on to the hope of change—for her children's future. At her lowest point, she contemplated suicide but found strength in her children's innocent faces.

### Separation and a Search for Solutions

Chitti left with her children, returning to her parental home in Guntur for two years. Despite efforts from elders to mediate, Eswar's family refused reconciliation. Still, Chitti rejected legal action—her only wish was to rebuild her family, not destroy it.

### VIMUKTHI's Intervention: A Collective Stand

VIMUKTHI, a survivor-led collective, stepped in with a strategic approach. Understanding both the emotional and legal dimensions, they initiated dialogue with



Eswar's family. When initial attempts were dismissed, they mobilized community elders and influencers, increasing the pressure. A community meeting was arranged, and under collective scrutiny, Eswar agreed to reconciliation—with clear conditions against further abuse.

### **A Second Chance with Accountability**

With VIMUKTHI's support, Chitti returned—but not in silence. Counseling was arranged for both partners, and Eswar was guided toward de-addiction support. VIMUKTHI monitored the situation to ensure her safety.

### **Chitti's New Path: From Survivor to Advocate**

Determined to build financial independence, Chitti enrolled in tailoring and embroidery training. She now actively participates in VIMUKTHI's programs and aspires to start a self-help group for women in Guntur facing similar struggles.

### **Impact and Change**

- **Reduced Violence:** No further abuse reported post-reunion.
- **Economic Stability:** Chitti's earnings now contribute 30% to household income.
- **Community Influence:** Three other women sought VIMUKTHI's support after hearing Chitti's story.

### **Key Learnings for NGOs & Policymakers**

- **Survivor-Led Action Works:** Collective pressure brings systemic change.
- **Counseling & Legal Awareness:** A combined approach prevents re-victimization.
- **Financial Independence Matters:** Economic empowerment strengthens decision-making.
- **Family-Centered Interventions:** Healing can happen with accountability, not just separation.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Support Systems**

- Establish family counseling centers for post-reconciliation conflict resolution.
- Create monitoring frameworks for high-risk cases.
- Expand livelihood programs for survivors.
- Formalize survivor-led collectives like VIMUKTHI as recognized mediators.

### **Conclusion: A Story of Strength and Change**

Chitti's journey is a powerful testament to resilience, community solidarity, and survivor-led action. Her story isn't just about survival—it's about reclaiming dignity, creating change, and inspiring others to break free from cycles of abuse.

## Breaking Chains: Rani's Journey from Crisis to Leadership

### Introduction

For years, Rani lived in silence, shackled by fear and a world that refused to hear her pain. But when survival became her only option, she transformed her suffering into strength—and her strength into an unstoppable force for change. This is a story of defiance, resilience, and leadership. Once a victim of systemic injustice, Rani shattered every barrier in her path, emerging as a beacon of hope for countless women. Her journey is proof that when women rise, they don't just survive—they revolutionize.

**"I thought my life was over, but now I help others reclaim their dignity." – Rani**



### Why This Story Matters

Rani's (name changed) struggle is not hers alone—it mirrors the reality of countless women trapped in cycles of violence, control, and exploitation. This case study exposes how survivor-led movements and structured interventions are not just lifelines but weapons against oppression. It demonstrates the power of economic freedom, legal empowerment, and grassroots advocacy in dismantling deep-seated systems of injustice.

### The Struggle: A Life Shaped by Hardship

Born into a marginalized community in coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rani's fate was sealed before she had a chance to define it herself. At just 17, she was forced into marriage with a much older man, subjected to relentless abuse, and stripped of financial independence. Every day felt like a prison sentence. Her voice was drowned in the suffocating walls of control, her dreams crushed before they could even take shape.

Then came the moment that shattered everything—her husband abandoned her and their two young children, leaving them penniless, starving, and vulnerable. Desperate to survive, Rani was preyed upon by loan sharks, exploited by unscrupulous employers, and trapped in a ruthless cycle of servitude. With no safety net, she faced humiliation, harassment, and the kind of fear that leaves permanent scars.

### A Lifeline: Finding Strength in Support

Rani's turning point came when she discovered a survivor-led collective supported by HELP. For the first time, she encountered a network that not only acknowledged her pain but armed her with the tools to fight back. Through:

- Legal aid to assert her rights against those who sought to silence her
- Counseling to rebuild her shattered confidence and self-worth
- Vocational training to secure financial independence and break free from dependence

Rani took her first steps toward freedom. She learned tailoring, secured stable employment, and, most importantly, reclaimed her voice. The woman who once lived in fear now walked with purpose—helping others to rise alongside her.

### **A Leader in the Making**

Rani's transformation ignited a fire in her—a refusal to let others suffer in silence. She stepped beyond her own survival and into the role of a fierce advocate. She began guiding other survivors through:

#### **Filing police complaints against abusers**

- Accessing government welfare programs previously denied to them
- Forming self-help groups (SHGs) to build financial security and break economic dependence

At first, she was just one voice speaking up. Then, her voice became an echo, resonating in the hearts of other survivors. Soon, it was a movement demanding justice. Rani's influence spread like wildfire as she organized community meetings, fearlessly confronting domestic violence, forced marriage, and workplace exploitation.

### **A Legacy of Change: Transforming Systems**

Rani's leadership culminated in her most groundbreaking achievement—the creation of a government-sponsored crisis response unit in her district. No longer would survivors be ignored or dismissed. She led policy dialogues that forced institutional accountability, resulting in:

- Faster police response times for domestic violence cases
- Direct access to legal and financial aid for survivors
- Stronger enforcement of protection laws and support systems
- Her impact was undeniable—she had forced the system to see, to listen, and to act.

### **The Roadmap to Leadership: Rani's Journey**

Rani's rise was not by chance—it was by sheer will and determination. Her journey followed a structured path:

- Year 1: Legal intervention, crisis support, and vocational training
- Year 2: Financial independence, survivor mentorship, and SHG leadership
- Year 3: Advocacy, policy engagement, and community mobilization
- Year 4: Systemic reform, institutional collaboration, and large-scale impact

### **Battling Resistance: The Fight for Justice**

- Rani's journey was a war against deeply entrenched patriarchy and systemic neglect. She faced:
- Community backlash from those who saw her as a threat to traditional norms

- Threats and intimidation from abusers who wanted her silenced
- Institutional apathy from authorities unwilling to act against oppression

But she refused to be broken. By building alliances with legal aid organizations and leveraging media attention, she turned every obstacle into an opportunity—forcing those in power to confront their failures and take action.

### **Measurable Impact: The Change She Created**

- Over 60 survivors gained access to legal aid and justice
  - 15 SHGs were formed, empowering 120+ women with financial independence
  - Law enforcement accountability increased, improving response times
- Stigma around survivor empowerment was shattered, creating a ripple effect of change

### **A Call to Action: The Future of Survivor Leadership**

Rani's journey is a testament to the unbreakable spirit of survivors. But her story is not finished—nor is the fight. To empower more women to lead, we must:

- Invest in structured leadership training for survivors to amplify their voices
- Strengthen survivor-led advocacy networks to demand systemic change
- Push for legal reforms that ensure swift and uncompromising justice
- Promote economic initiatives that create lasting independence and security

Rani's story is more than inspiration—it is a battle cry. She has proven that when survivors rise, they don't just lead—they ignite revolutions.

## **Rising from Adversity: Anitha's Journey of Survival and Leadership**

### **Introduction**

Anitha's (name changed) journey is one of courage, resilience, and transformation. This case study sheds light on how a survivor of exploitation and abuse in Andhra Pradesh, India, overcame adversity to become a beacon of hope and leadership for others. For privacy reasons, we refer to her as Anitha. Her story is a testament to the power of support networks, legal empowerment, and advocacy in breaking cycles of oppression and paving the way for systemic change.



"I was told I had no options. But now, I help other women find their own paths to freedom." – Anitha

### **Purpose of the Case Study**

This case study examines Anitha's remarkable transformation from a survivor of abuse and exploitation to a powerful advocate for women's rights and systemic change. It highlights



the importance of support networks and survivor-led initiatives in empowering individuals to challenge oppression. Her leadership has not only uplifted her own life but has also created a ripple effect, inspiring many others to seek justice and independence.

### **Background: The Crisis**

Born into a marginalized community, Anitha's struggles began early. Forced into marriage at 15, she endured years of domestic violence and economic exploitation at the hands of her husband and in-laws. Every attempt to escape was met with threats, societal rejection, and a lack of legal protection. With no financial independence and limited support, she found herself trapped in a cycle of abuse. The toll on her mental and emotional health was severe, leading to PTSD and suicidal thoughts, with no visible way out.

Anitha's story is not an isolated case; it mirrors the experiences of millions of women worldwide. According to local data, 75% of women in her community have experienced domestic violence, yet only 10% have accessed legal recourse. Her struggle highlights the broader challenges of gender-based violence, financial dependency, and systemic discrimination that continue to oppress women in marginalized communities.

### **Intervention and Support Systems**

Anitha's turning point came when she connected with **VIMUKTHI**, a survivor-led collective, and **HELP**, a local support organization. These groups provided her with a safe shelter, legal aid, and psychological support—but more importantly, they helped her reclaim her identity. She was educated on her rights, trained in self-sufficiency, and introduced to a network of survivors who had walked similar paths. For the first time in years, she saw a glimmer of hope.

With the support of these organizations, Anitha also gained access to alternative livelihood opportunities. She received vocational training in tailoring and small business management, which enabled her to rebuild her economic independence. Within a year, she started her own tailoring business, earning enough to support herself and her children, marking a significant milestone in her journey toward self-reliance.

### **The Turning Point: Survivor Advocacy & Leadership**

Determined to ensure that no other woman suffered in silence, Anitha became deeply involved in survivor advocacy. She attended legal workshops, supported over 100 survivors in navigating the justice system, and helped form 12 self-help groups (SHGs). With each case she assisted, her confidence grew. Over time, she transitioned from a participant to a community leader, amplifying the voices of the oppressed and demanding justice on their behalf.

One of Anitha's most impactful contributions was organizing community dialogues with law enforcement officers, local government representatives, and community elders. By fostering direct conversations about domestic violence and legal accountability, she began shifting the perspectives of those in power, ensuring better enforcement of laws protecting women.

Her relentless efforts contributed to greater awareness and action within the community, leading to stronger institutional responses against gender-based violence.

### **Anitha's Leadership Development Framework**

Anitha's journey from survivor to leader followed a clear progression:

In the first year, she focused on survival, escaping domestic violence with the help of survivor-led networks. She received emergency shelter, legal support, and psychological counseling, which provided her with the foundation to start anew. She also pursued vocational training, enabling her to gain financial independence.

During the second year, she shifted toward empowerment and advocacy. She participated in survivor leadership training, attended legal workshops, and began mentoring other survivors. She also started organizing awareness campaigns to educate women about their rights and available support systems.

By the third and fourth years, Anitha had firmly established herself as a leader advocating for systemic change. She formed and led 12 SHGs, helping over 200 women achieve financial independence. Her work influenced local government policies, leading to the creation of a crisis response team for domestic violence cases. She also spearheaded initiatives to establish emergency shelters for survivors, ensuring long-term support for vulnerable women.

### **Overcoming Challenges & Systemic Barriers**

Despite her progress, Anitha faced numerous obstacles. Resistance from law enforcement and local authorities was a significant challenge. Many officers were reluctant to intervene in domestic violence cases due to deep-seated cultural biases. To address this, Anitha partnered with legal aid organizations to conduct training sessions for police officers, improving their responsiveness to such cases.

She also encountered threats and intimidation from perpetrators seeking to silence her activism. To counter this, she built a strong network of survivor-led collectives that provided protection, rapid response mechanisms, and legal backing. This support system enabled her to continue her work without fear.

Financial barriers also posed a challenge for survivors seeking independence. Anitha facilitated access to microfinance opportunities through SHGs, empowering women to start their own businesses. This economic independence was crucial in breaking the cycle of abuse and dependency.

### **Alignment with Larger Systemic Solutions**

Anitha's intervention aligns with broader systemic solutions to combat gender-based violence and empower women. By combining direct support with advocacy, she played a crucial role in changing societal attitudes toward domestic violence and women's rights. Her

efforts contributed to policy changes, such as the establishment of a crisis response team for domestic violence cases, ensuring long-term systemic improvements.

Her work also influenced law enforcement and local authorities, leading to faster responses to domestic violence cases and stronger legal protections for survivors. This holistic approach—integrating individual empowerment with collective action—demonstrates how grassroots movements can drive lasting change.

### **Survivor Testimonials and Data**

The impact of Anitha's work is best reflected in the voices of those she has helped. Lakshmi, a survivor who benefited from Anitha's guidance, shared, "Anitha's story gave me hope when I had none. She showed me that there was a way out, and now I'm living independently, supporting my children." Similarly, Ramana, who gained financial independence through an SHG, stated, "Thanks to the training I received, I started my own business. I feel empowered, and I'm now helping other women do the same."

Quantitative data further highlights the effectiveness of Anitha's efforts. Over 42 women have accessed legal aid and protection services through her initiatives. More than 36 survivors have achieved financial independence through the SHGs she helped create. Additionally, law enforcement and local authorities now respond 35% faster to domestic violence cases, demonstrating improved institutional efficiency.

### **Conclusion: Lessons for Organizations and Policymakers**

Anitha's story underscores the power of survivor-led movements in driving systemic change. Her journey highlights the importance of providing not just immediate relief but also long-term empowerment through legal support, economic independence, and leadership training.

For organizations and policymakers, key takeaways include the need to invest in structured leadership training for survivors, strengthen survivor-led initiatives, and enhance legal frameworks to ensure better protection and justice for victims of gender-based violence. By supporting survivor-driven advocacy, stakeholders can create more inclusive and sustainable solutions for social change.

Anitha's journey is a testament to the fact that even in the face of immense adversity, leadership can emerge, and transformative change can be achieved.

### **Case Study: Chitra's Journey of Resilience**

**Name:** K. Chitra

**Age:** 29

**Place:** Musthabad, Vijayawada



## **Background**

Chitra (name changed) 29 years was one of six children in a family struggling to survive on her father's daily wages. Forced to drop out of school in third grade, she was married off at just 11 years old to her maternal brother-in-law. By the age of 15, she had given birth to two children, a decision made by her father to relieve himself of financial responsibility.

Her husband, also a daily wage laborer, earned very little, which led to frequent disputes. Over time, he became abusive, demanding more dowry and accusing Chitra of infidelity. His alcoholism and escalating violence left Chitra in a helpless state. The situation worsened when he began forcing her into sex work to bring in money. Driven to the brink of suicide, Chitra endured these hardships solely for the sake of her children.

Abandoned by her husband, she struggled to provide for her young children, sometimes resorting to begging on the streets. Eventually, a tenant introduced her to sex work as a means of survival. Reluctant at first, Chitra was left with no choice as hunger and despair took over.

## **The Crisis**

Despite her hardships, Chitra remained emotionally attached to her family. However, when she sought solace at her parents' home, she was met with rejection and violence. Her parents and siblings expelled her, labeling her a disgrace. The only asset she had was a small piece of land given to her at marriage, where she built a house with her earnings. She took out a loan of ₹4 lakh to complete construction, ensuring a safe shelter for her children.

However, her family turned against her, demanding that she vacate the house, claiming rights over the land. The conflict escalated into brutal physical assault, with her own brothers and maternal uncle attacking her. She was subjected to further humiliation when her younger brother demanded she sleep with him, stating that she was already a sex worker. Her uncle even attempted to abuse her young daughter.

## **HELP & VIMUKTHI's Intervention**

During a community meeting organized by HELP and VIMUKTHI, Chitra learned about their work in supporting trafficking survivors and sex workers. Encouraged by a friend, she shared her ordeal with HELP's district facilitator, Roja, and crisis coordinator, Jayaprada.

HELP and VIMUKTHI leaders intervened by confronting Chitra's parents and explaining the legal consequences of their abuse. Despite warnings, her family continued to harass her, leaving her with no option but to file a police complaint. With the support of HELP, she lodged a case against her parents and uncle. The police took immediate action, summoning them for questioning and issuing a stern warning. While the abuse subsided, the stigma from her family persists.

## **Current Status**

Reflecting on her journey, Chitra proudly states, ***“I never knew about legal rights, police protection, or victim compensation until I joined HELP and VIMUKTHI. Now, I can stand up for myself and even support others in similar situations.”***

With their assistance, Chitra applied for Immediate Relief Support under GO.MS.No. 28 and Victim Compensation, both of which are under process with the Department of Women Development & Child Welfare and the District Legal Services Authority in Machilipatnam.

Today, Chitra is raising her children, ensuring their education, and supporting her family through daily wage work. She has also joined a local Self-Help Group (SHG), saving money with the goal of starting her own livelihood with the support of a bank loan. Her journey from victim to survivor is a testament to resilience, empowerment, and the transformative impact of HELP and VIMUKTHI.



## "From Silence to Social Security"



## Case Study: Jamuna's Journey from Crisis to Stability

### Executive Summary

Jamuna, (name changed) aged 26 a survivor of early marriage and financial hardship, transformed her life through legal aid and social support. With HELP organisation which is working for the socio-economic empowerment of survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (sex workers) and VIMUKTHI – a survivors collective's intervention, she accessed welfare benefits, secured housing, and became an advocate for other survivors. Her case highlights systemic challenges in accessing victim compensation and the need for policy reforms to enhance survivor reintegration and economic stability.



**"I once fought just to survive—now, I fight so no one else has to endure what I did." - Jamuna**

### Early Hardships and Vulnerability

Raised in Vijayawada's YSR Colony, Jamuna faced financial struggles after her father's death. At 14, she was married off due to economic insecurity, only to be abandoned after having two children. Forced to return home, she worked as a daily wage laborer but remained trapped in debt. During this crisis, she was exploited and drawn into sex work. Legal intervention led to her temporary stay at Vasavya Shelter Home, initiating her path to rehabilitation.

### Legal Aid and Social Reintegration

Jamuna found hope through VIMUKTHI, where she gained legal awareness and access to welfare schemes. HELP guided her in obtaining essential identity documents and navigating the victim compensation process. Empowered by her knowledge, she became an advocate, helping others access legal aid and social support. With HELP and VIMUKTHI's assistance, she also applied for government housing, a critical step toward stability.

### Victim Compensation and Housing Support

While her financial compensation remains pending, Jamuna successfully secured a housing site in Jakkampudi Colony, Vijayawada, a milestone in her journey. However, her case underscores bureaucratic delays in victim compensation, preventing timely relief for survivors in dire need.

## Challenges in Accessing Support

- **Delays in Compensation:** Survivors face prolonged bureaucratic procedures.
- **Limited Awareness:** Many remain unaware of their legal rights and welfare programs.
- **Social Stigma:** Reintegration is difficult due to societal biases.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Lack of sustainable livelihood options forces survivors back into exploitative conditions.

## Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- **Expedite Compensation Disbursement:** Streamline administrative processes.
- **Expand Legal Aid Services:** Increase funding and outreach for survivor assistance.
- **Enhance Vocational Training:** Provide diverse skill-building programs.
- **Strengthen Awareness Campaigns:** Combat stigma through community education.
- **Promote Survivor Leadership:** Institutionalize survivor-led initiatives like VIMUKTHI.

## Future Outlook and Call to Action

Jamuna's journey highlights the need for sustained support beyond immediate relief. While securing housing was significant, ensuring timely victim compensation and long-term economic rehabilitation remains critical. Policymakers and social organizations must prioritize:

- Fast-tracking victim compensation applications.
- Strengthening survivor collectives and legal aid collaborations.
- Increasing funding for economic empowerment programs.

## Conclusion: Building a Path to Empowerment

Jamuna's transformation from financial distress to stability showcases the power of legal aid, social support, and resilience. HELP and VIMUKTHI's efforts enabled her rehabilitation, but systemic inefficiencies persist. Addressing these gaps will help survivors break free from exploitation and build dignified futures.

### Ramya: A Survivor's Unheard Fight for Justice

*"Why did they rescue me if they were just going to abandon me again? Justice should not depend on destiny—it should be a right." - Ramya*

#### *Betrayed by Family, Trapped by Fate*

At just 17, Ramya (name changed) from Guntur was sold into a brothel—by her own aunt. **"I never imagined my**



**own family could do this to me,”** she recalls. Though rescued in 2018, her struggle for justice had only begun.

### *A System That Failed Her*

After systemic detention for a longer period of three years in a shelter home, Ramya expected support for a fresh start. But the police and shelter authorities neglected her rightful victim compensation claim. **“I was told I could get compensation, but no one came forward to help me. It felt like they just wanted to forget me.”**

With untreated back pain from past trauma, she now works as a daily laborer in a Mirchi Yard, earning just ₹6000 a month. **“If I don’t work, my family won’t eat,”** she says, pushing through exhaustion.

### *HELP and VIMUKTHI: A Glimmer of Hope*

When HELP organisation working for the socio-economic and legal justice services for the rescued survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (sex workers) and VIMUKTHI – a survivors collective learned of her case, they guided her through legal processes and connected her to survivor networks. **“Without HELP, I wouldn’t even know where to start. They told me this is my right, not charity.”**

However, years of systemic neglect made justice hard to access. **“VIMUKTHI gave me courage, but even they can’t always fight the system. I feel stuck.”** Ramya opined with a fee of firmness.

### *A Mother’s Determined Fight*

Despite her struggles, Ramya’s priority is her daughter’s education. **“I don’t care what happens to me. My daughter will study. She won’t live my life.”** With little support from her husband, she fights daily to keep this promise, even as her compensation remains out of reach.

### *A Broken System, A Call for Justice*

Ramya’s story reflects the failure of the system to uphold survivors’ rights. Victim compensation is not charity—it is recognition of the crime committed against them. Yet, the process remains entangled in bureaucracy.

**“I am not asking for favors. I just want what is mine. What the law says is mine.”**

### What Must Change?

- Immediate processing of Ramya's pending victim compensation
- Access to healthcare and ration for her family and education for her children
- Accountability for institutions that neglect survivors
- Systemic reform to ensure no survivor is left waiting for justice

Because survival is not enough—dignity and justice must follow.

### "Rescued but Rejected: Ramyasri's Fight for Justice and Dignity"

At just 17, Ramyasri (name changed) from Tenali, Andhra Pradesh, was trafficked into forced prostitution in Rajahmundry. Sold by those she trusted, she endured six months of brutal exploitation before being rescued on May 26, 2018.

**"In that brothel, I died every day—once for myself, and once for the family that never came for me." - Ramyasri anguished.**

#### Survival, Not Stability

After her rescue, Ramyasri hoped for a fresh start through marriage, but separation left her as the sole provider for her six-year-old daughter. With no formal education, she now works as a domestic laborer, earning just ₹3,000 a month. Her family's total income barely reaches ₹5,000, forcing them to struggle for basic survival. She dazed **"Some days, I finish work and wonder how to stretch the last 100 rupees until tomorrow."**



#### HELP's Immediate Legal Intervention: Fighting for Ramyasri's Rights

While her rescue brought her out of captivity, Ramyasri remained vulnerable to systemic neglect. HELP organisation working for the protection and welfare of survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (Sex Workers) and VIMUKTHI – (a survivors collective mentored by HELP for socio-economic empowerment) leaders **acted swiftly** to ensure she wasn't left without support:



### 1. Ensuring Release from Institutional Care

Following her rescue, Ramyasri was placed in a government-run shelter home. HELP intervened by engaging with the **AP State Women Commission**, advocating for her release into a safer and more supportive environment. They ensured her transition back into the community was **monitored and safe**, preventing re-victimization.

### 2. Legal Support and Justice Process Initiation

HELP facilitated the crucial **164 CrPC statement** recording—a critical step in criminal justice services ensuring the perpetrators faced legal consequences. Additionally, they coordinated a **home investigation** to assess Ramyasri's safety and family situation, ensuring she had a secure place to return.

### 3. Victim Compensation Application: A Delayed Right

In 2021, HELP and VIMUKTHI helped Ramyasri file for **victim compensation** under government guidelines, advocating for financial aid of up to ₹5 lakh. Despite clear eligibility, her application was met with bureaucratic indifference. HELP persistently followed up with the **District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)**, demanding action on her claim.

### 4. Legal Awareness and Psychosocial Support

HELP's legal team provided **awareness on her rights**, ensuring she understood that compensation wasn't charity—it was her legal entitlement. They also offered **counseling and emotional support**, empowering her to rebuild confidence and reclaim her dignity.

**"They told me I have a right. That I don't have to beg—I have to fight. Now I believe them."** – Ramyasri expressed with a stern voice.

#### The Fight for Justice: A System That Ignores Survivors

Despite HELP's efforts, Ramyasri's compensation claim remains stalled. Like many survivors, she is caught in an unresponsive system that delays justice while she struggles to survive.

**"They say the government helps girls like me... but I've been waiting for years. I don't want charity—I want justice."**Ramyasri asserted.

#### A Broken System That Fails Its Survivors

HELP's intervention prevented Ramyasri from falling back into the cycle of exploitation, but the absence of a **structured legal and welfare response** continues to hinder her progress.

Call to Action: Justice Cannot Wait

1. **Immediate release of her victim compensation payment.**
2. **Mandatory legal aid and case monitoring for all survivors.**
3. **Access to healthcare, ration support, and education for her daughter.**
4. **DLSA accountability for pending survivor cases.**

### Conclusion: More than Rescue – A Right to Rebuild

Ramyasri's case is not an exception—it is the reality of many survivors. Rescue is only the first step; justice, compensation, and rehabilitation must follow.

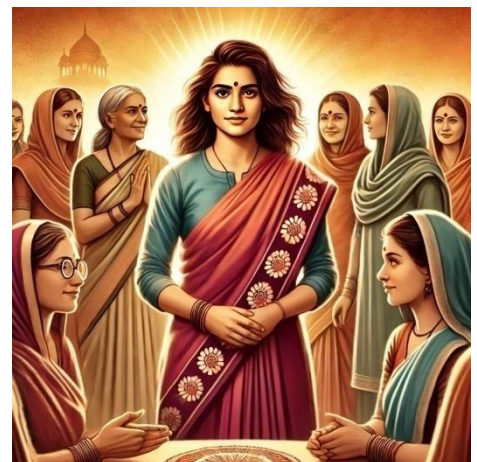
**"I am not asking for favors. I am asking for what is mine."**Ramyasri stressed.

### "Suvatha's struggle: A Fight for Dignity, Justice, and a Future"

Suvartha, a 19-year-old from Sarada Colony, Guntur, dreamed of breaking free from poverty through education. Her father, a cab driver, barely managed to sustain their family, while her mother remained bedridden due to chronic illness. Every month, the weight of medical expenses, household needs, and college fees for her B.Tech. Course grew heavier.

***"Every morning, I prayed my father wouldn't break down. How long could one man carry a family's dreams?"***Suvartha bemoaned of her hardships.

Despite her determination, financial desperation pushed her into a dangerous situation. A tenant at their home, noticing her struggles and taking them as an advantage, offered her a way out—quick money with no strings attached. In a moment of hopelessness, Suvartha accepted, unaware that this decision would change her life forever.



### A Costly Mistake, A Harsh Reality

What seemed like a one-time act to cover her college fees and her mother's medicines turned into a troubling trap. The promises of easy money led her deeper into exploitation, until a hotel raid in Guntur exposed her involvement. Arrested and taken to the police station, she faced the unbearable weight of shame and fear.

*"Sitting in that police station, I felt my life was over. I couldn't breathe thinking of my father's face if he knew where I was."lamented Suvatha.*

She was treated as a criminal, not a victim of circumstance. The system that should have protected her instead threatened to define her by one desperate decision.

#### *A Lifeline from VIMUKTHI*

At her lowest moment, a helping hand arrived in the form of VIMUKTHI, a collective of trafficking survivors and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation. Leaders like Lalithaakka and Lavanya saw beyond the "accused" label and recognized a young woman trapped by hardship, not by choice. They intervened, securing her release and providing temporary shelter at Prajwala Home.

***"They didn't look at me with disgust. They asked why I did it. No one had ever asked me that before."***Suvatha wondering.

For the first time, Suvatha learned about her rights. The VIMUKTHI team explained the Victim Compensation Scheme (VCS) and the support she was entitled to access under government policies. A small spark of hope ignited within her with a ray of raising life.

#### *The Long Road to Justice*

Determined to rebuild her life, Suvatha vowed to stay away from the path that almost destroyed her. But the journey was far from easy. Bureaucratic delays stalled her compensation claim, leaving her family's financial crisis unresolved. Her education remained uncertain as unpaid fees mounted in her college, and her mother's health deteriorated with no access to proper treatment.

*"Some days, I think of going back... but then I remember what Lalithakka (like an elder sister) told me—'You're not your mistakes, Suvatha. You deserve to finish what you started.' Those words keep me alive."*Suvatha affirmed with a sense of courage and confidence.

Despite clear legal provisions for victim support, she remains stuck in a cycle of neglect and inaction. Without compensation or educational assistance, survival remains a daily battle.

#### *What She Needs to Move Forward*

- Immediate approval of her victim compensation claim
- Legal aid to ensure justice isn't lost in bureaucracy
- Scholarships or fee waivers to complete her B.Tech
- Healthcare support for her mother
- Alternative livelihood opportunities for family stability

- Continuous monitoring to prevent re-victimization

### A Call for Urgent Action

Suvartha's story is not unique—many young women in crisis fall through the cracks of a failing system. While policies exist, their implementation is riddled with barriers. Without intervention, countless survivors will remain trapped in cycles of poverty and exploitation.

*"If they help me now, I will stand on my feet. If not, I don't know how long I can fight this battle. I just want to finish my studies and be someone my father can be proud of." Suvartha voiced with a ray of hope to rebuild her life.*

Justice for Suvartha cannot wait. Compensation, education, and healthcare are not privileges—they are her rights. It is time for the system to act.

## "Stolen Childhood, Stolen Rights: Mary's Fight for Justice and Dignity"

### Case Study: P. Mary – A Survivor's Fight for Justice and Rights

#### Early Hardships and Betrayal

Orphaned young, P. Mary, (name changed) 26 years, from Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, faced instability after her mother's death and her father's imprisonment. Despite being allotted ₹1 lakh and a house as a semi-orphan, her relatives misappropriated her entitlements, leaving her without financial security.

#### Trapped in Exploitation

At 18, Mary was placed in a Swadhaar home, where she met Nalini, who took her in under false pretenses. Instead of a safe haven, she endured five years of forced sex work while Nalini's family built their own future earning by the body of Mary.

***"I was used for their benefit while they built their lives. My pain was invisible," Mary recalls.***

Seeking escape, she entered a relationship with a regular client, but conflicts forced her out. Seeking refuge with her aunt, she was soon arrested in a police raid on a brothel.

#### A Raid That Changed Everything

Mary's arrest became a turning point. Seen as a criminal rather than a victim, she felt abandoned.

*"They saw me as a criminal. No one asked why I was there." Mary lamented.*



### Immediate Legal Intervention: HELP & VIMUKTHI's Timely Action

When Mary was arrested during the police raid, she was treated as a criminal rather than a victim of exploitation. With no legal representation or support system, she was left vulnerable to further victimization. However, HELP organisation working for the protection of rights of survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (Sex Workers) and VIMUKTHI – a survivors collective have quickly stepped in to ensure her rights were upheld and that she received the protection and justice she deserved.

### Key Interventions by HELP and VIMUKTHI

- **Securing the FIR and Legal Follow-up:** HELP's team ensured that Mary's case was properly documented by securing a copy of the First Information Report (FIR). This was a crucial step in preventing wrongful prosecution and paving the way for her to receive justice as a survivor rather than being labeled an offender.
- **Support and Legal Counseling:** Upon securing her release, HELP facilitators and VIMUKTHI leaders immediately met with Mary. They provided moral support and legal counseling, explaining her rights as a survivor of trafficking and as a victim of commercial sexual exploitation by sex work. This intervention helped Mary understand the available legal remedies and protections she was entitled to under Indian law.
- **Immediate Financial Relief under GO.MS. No.28:** To ensure urgent financial stability, HELP facilitated ₹20,000 in immediate relief from the government under GO.MS. No.28. This assistance was critical in ensuring she had basic financial security while her legal battle for full compensation and entitlements was initiated.
- **Enrolling Mary in the VIMUKTHI Survivors Collective:** Understanding that long-term support is essential for reintegration and empowerment, HELP connected Mary with VIMUKTHI, a survivor-led collective. Through this network, she gained access to emotional support, peer mentorship, legal aid, and economic empowerment programs. The collective also ensured regular follow-ups to prevent re-victimization and provide a platform for her to advocate for her rights.

**"For the first time, someone spoke to me like I mattered. They didn't ask why I was there—they asked what I needed to get out." – Mary**

This comprehensive intervention not only secured Mary's immediate safety but also set her on a path to reclaim her stolen entitlements, ensuring she was no longer alone in her fight for justice.

### Path to Justice and Rehabilitation

Mary's fight continues with:

- Legal proceedings to reclaim her stolen entitlements
- Victim compensation claims through District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)
- Skill-building, livelihood support, and counseling
- Long-term monitoring to prevent re-victimization

***"Now, I feel I am not alone. VIMUKTHI is with me. They told me I can still fight for what is mine." Mary energized to explore with an excited voice.***



### Systemic Failures Exposed

- No oversight to protect government entitlements
- Lack of legal mechanisms for asset recovery
- Years of exploitation without intervention

### Survivor's Demand for Justice

*"I am not asking for favors. I want my home back, my rights back. The system owes me that much" affirmed Mary.*

### Conclusion: A Fight for Dignity

Mary's case underscores the urgent need for systemic accountability. Justice and compensation are not acts of charity—they are her **legal rights**. HELP and VIMUKTHI remain steadfast in advocating until her dignity is restored. Now, it's time for the system to act.

## "Menaka's Fight: From Betrayal to Justice, A Survivor's Unyielding Claim"

### A Dream Derailed

Menaka, (name changed) aged 17 a young girl from Tenali, Guntur District, dreamed of supporting her mother and escaping poverty. Her parents' separation forced her to drop out of school after Class IX, leaving her mother who is a contract bus conductor, to struggle alone for family survival.

*"I wanted to help my mother... I thought learning tailoring would give us a better life." Menaka expressed her feel of dilemma.*

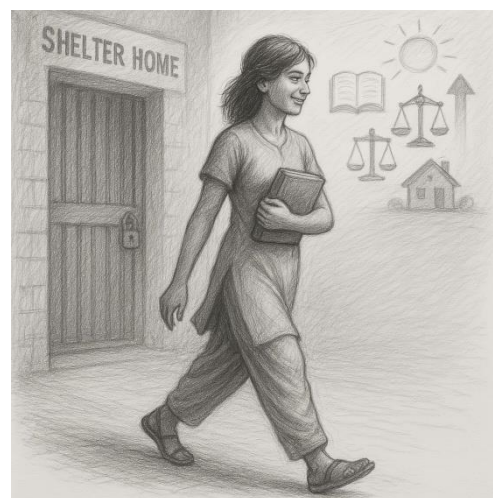
Trusting a local tailoring teacher, Ramadevi, Menaka hoped for stability but instead found herself trapped in commercial sexual exploitation.

### Betrayed by Trust: Lured into a Nightmare

Ramadevi manipulated Menaka's desperation, luring her into what she claimed was an opportunity to earn. What began as small errands soon escalated into something sinister.

*"Ramadevi aunty took me to Vijayawada... she said no one will know us there. But that day, police raided the house. I was so scared... I thought they'd beat me." Menaka lamented in a state of betrayal.*

Caught in a police raid on a trafficking network, Menaka found herself treated as a criminal instead of a victim.



## Rescue Without Relief: A System That Failed

Instead of protection, Menaka and her mother faced humiliation. Authorities showed no empathy, and she was placed in Ujjawala Home in Vijayawada, where fear and confusion replaced any sense of safety.

*Menaka dejected "My mother begged them, but they just shouted at her. I felt like... like we were nothing."*

## A Lifeline: HELP and VIMUKTHI Step In

Through VIMUKTHI's survivor network, crisis coordinator of HELP which is working for the protection and promotion of rights of survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation learned of Menaka's plight. Unlike others, they saw her as a survivor, not an offender.

*"They sat with me. They said, 'You did nothing wrong. We are here for you.' No one had ever said that to me before." Menaka voiced with a sense of pleasure.*

### Immediate Intervention: HELP and VIMUKTHI's Critical Support

HELP and VIMUKTHI swiftly stepped in after learning about Menaka's situation, ensuring she was treated as a survivor rather than a criminal. Their intervention focused on legal support, emotional rehabilitation, and securing her rightful entitlements.

#### 1. Engaging with the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) for Her Release

Following the police raid, Menaka was placed in Ujjawala Home in Vijayawada, a government-run shelter. However, she was held there without understanding her rights or having any say in her future. The environment, while meant for protection, felt like another form of confinement, adding to her distress.

HELP intervened by:

- Personally meeting with the **Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in Guntur** to explain Menaka's background, ensuring they recognized her as a **victim of trafficking, not an offender**.
- Submitting formal petitions advocating for her **safe reintegration with her mother, rather than prolonged institutionalization**.
- Ensuring the authorities followed **due process under child protection laws** instead of treating her case with negligence.

After continuous follow-ups, HELP successfully secured Menaka's release, allowing her to reunite with her mother and begin the process of rebuilding her life.

#### 2. Initiating Her Victim Compensation Application

Under the **Victim Compensation Scheme**, survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation are entitled to financial support to aid in rehabilitation. However, many survivors, like Menaka, are either unaware of this entitlement or face **bureaucratic delays** in accessing it.

HELP took proactive steps by:

- Filing an application with the **District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)** to initiate Menaka's compensation claim.
- Ensuring the case met all documentation requirements, preventing unnecessary delays.
- Following up persistently with legal authorities to **expedite the process**, preventing Menaka from being further disadvantaged by red tape.
- Educating Menaka about the compensation process, making sure she understood that this was **not a favor but her legal right**.

Despite HELP's efforts, the claim remains pending, highlighting the urgent need for **faster processing and survivor-centric legal mechanisms**.

### 3. Providing Legal Awareness and Psychosocial Support

For many survivors, the trauma of betrayal and exploitation leaves deep emotional scars. Being treated as a criminal during the raid and later facing **social stigma** only worsened Menaka's mental state. HELP and VIMUKTHI understood that **justice isn't just about legal aid—it's about emotional recovery and empowerment**.

- HELP and VIMUKTHI leaders **counseled Menaka**, helping her process the trauma of betrayal and systemic neglect.
- She was **informed of her legal rights**, ensuring she could advocate for herself in future interactions with authorities.
- She was connected with **peer survivors from the VIMUKTHI Collective**, giving her a support system of women who had overcome similar struggles.
- HELP arranged access to **psychosocial counseling**, offering her emotional stability and confidence to move forward.

*"They told me I was not at fault. That I had rights. That my future was still mine to claim. For the first time, I believed them." – Menaka*

#### A Step Forward, But More to be Done

While HELP and VIMUKTHI successfully **ensured Menaka's release and initiated her legal claims**, systemic delays continue to stall her access to compensation and economic recovery. She remains determined, but her journey underscores the **need for urgent reforms** to ensure survivors receive justice without unnecessary delays.

#### Fighting for Justice and a Future

Menaka slowly realized that compensation wasn't charity but a legal right—recognition of the harm she endured.

***Menaka was so persistent that "They told me compensation is not charity... it's for what happened to me. Now, I want to fight for it."***

She dreams of returning to education or learning a skill that ensures a dignified future, but delays in compensation and lack of systemic support threaten to push her back into vulnerability.

***"I just want to go back to learning... but this time, learn something that makes my mother proud."Menaka firmly expressed her will.***

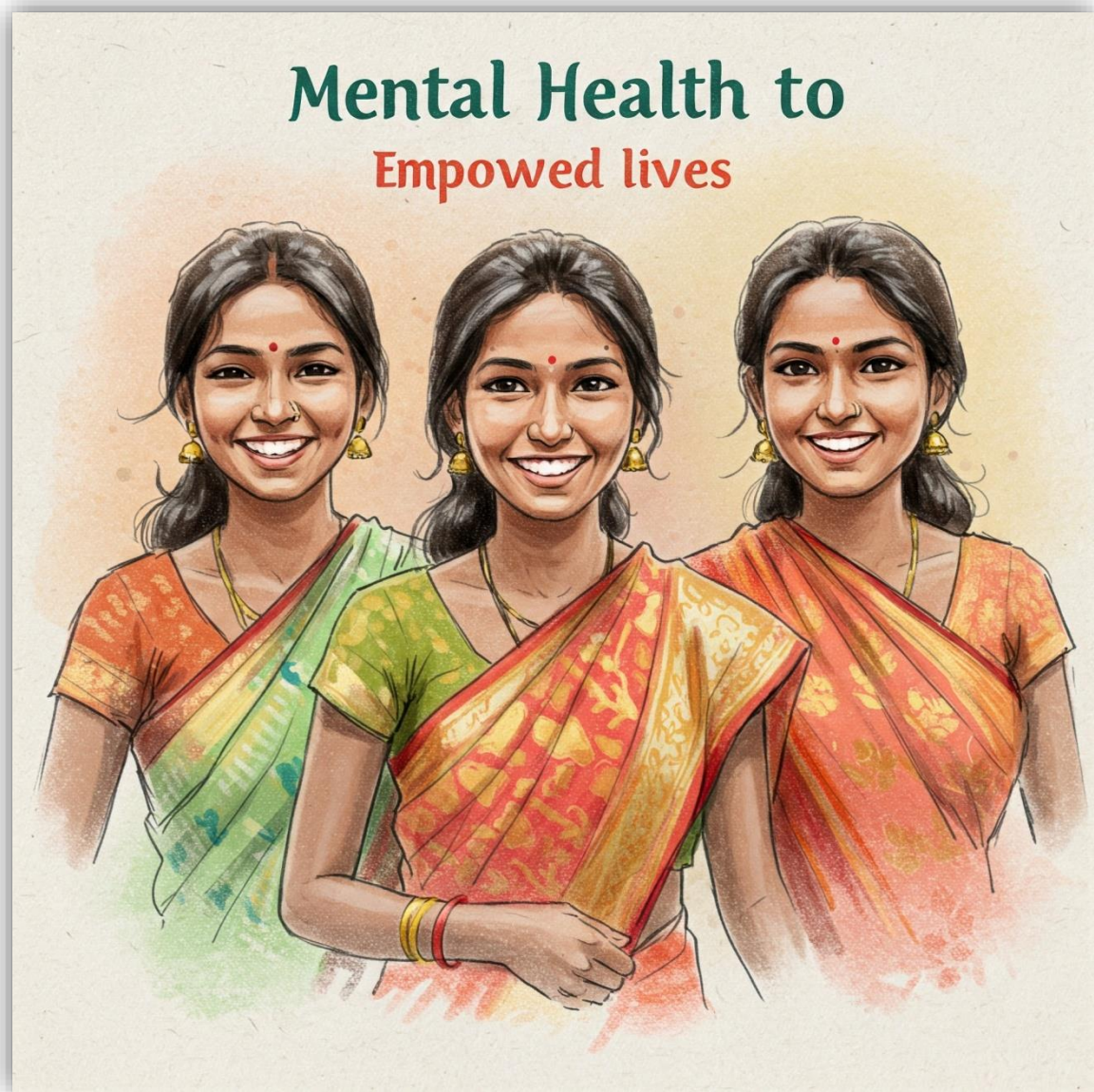
#### The Call for Justice and Systemic Change

Menaka's case exposes failures in law enforcement, delayed legal support, and the lack of economic recovery options for survivors. Victim Compensation is not a handout—it is a fundamental right that must be delivered without delay.

HELP and VIMUKTHI continue to fight for Menaka's compensation, access to welfare schemes, and a secure future. But justice cannot wait.

***"They told me I have a right. Now I believe them. I will wait... but I won't stop until they give me what is mine."Menaka's firm faith in HELP and VIMUKTHI exhibited.***

## Mental Health to Empowered Lives





## Breaking Through the Darkness: Shanthi's Journey from Despair to Leadership

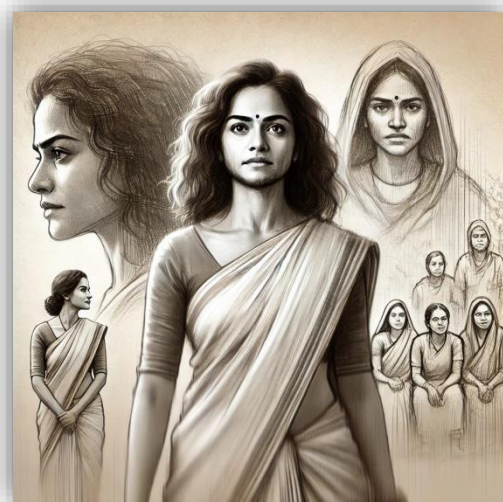
### Introduction

Shanthi (name changed) endured heartbreak, betrayal, and deep loneliness but found the strength to rise for herself and her children. This case study highlights her transformation from despair to leadership, emphasizing the role of community support, mental health awareness, and survivor-led initiatives.

**"I thought my life had no meaning. But then I realized—I am still a mother, a survivor, and a woman who deserves to live with dignity." – Shanthi**

### A Life of Struggle: Betrayal and Emotional Turmoil

Shanthi, from Jakkampudi Colony, Vijayawada, faced years of hardship. After separating from her abusive, alcoholic husband, she ensured her children were placed in a hostel. Seeking companionship, she formed a relationship with a tenant, only to be abandoned when he chose to marry another. Overwhelmed by heartbreak and loneliness, she attempted suicide by consuming sleeping pills.



### Finding Strength in Support: A Turning Point

**"I was drowning in pain, and I thought ending my life was the only escape. But VIMUKTHI showed me that my story was not over yet." – Shanthi**

VIMUKTHI intervened, offering emotional support and guidance. Their encouragement reminded her of her responsibilities and inner strength. Through counseling and peer support, she realized she was not alone and found renewed purpose.

### From Survival to Empowerment: Rebuilding with Purpose

**"At first, I thought I had lost everything. But when I joined VIMUKTHI's programs, I realized I still had the power to rebuild my life." – Shanthi**

Engaging in VIMUKTHI's programs, she attended mental health workshops, shared her story, and participated in self-help groups (SHGs). She learned tailoring and small business management, gaining financial independence and inspiring other women.

### Becoming a Leader: Advocating for Women's Mental Health

**"I found a purpose beyond my own pain—ensuring no other woman suffers in silence." – Shanthi**



Recognizing the need for mental health support, Shanthi trained in therapeutic counseling and began organizing peer support meetings. She launched mental health awareness sessions and incorporated emotional resilience training within SHGs, empowering women to handle crises.

### **Overcoming Barriers: The Fight for Change**

Despite community resistance, she persisted in advocating for mental health awareness. Partnering with local counselors, she helped integrate psychological support into VIMUKTHI's survivor rehabilitation programs, breaking the stigma surrounding emotional trauma.

### **Future Goals and Expanding Her Impact**

Shanthi aspires to establish a community mental health resource center offering counseling, resilience training, and financial empowerment programs. She aims to train other women in therapeutic counseling, ensuring long-term support for survivors.

### **Impact and Measurable Change**

- Over 20 women sought counseling after hearing her story.
- 5 women in distress found emotional healing.
- 3 survivors who attempted self-harm received psychological intervention.
- Mental health awareness became part of VIMUKTHI's programs.
- Emotional resilience training was integrated into SHGs.

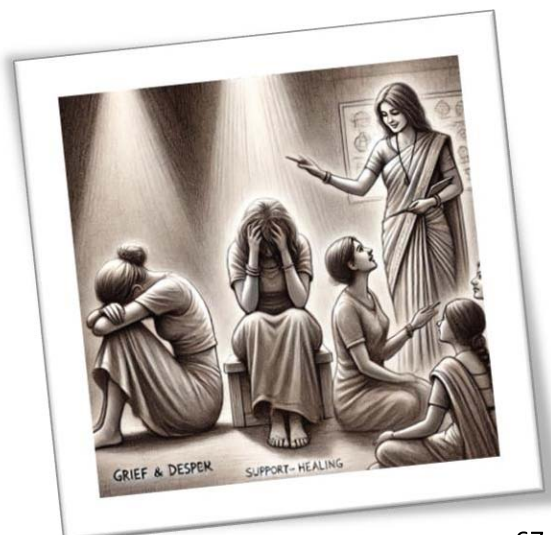
### **Conclusion: A Journey of Strength and Hope**

Shanthi's transformation highlights the power of resilience, mental health awareness, and survivor-led support. Her advocacy challenges societal taboos and ensures no woman suffers in silence. Her journey is not just about survival—it's about leading others toward healing and empowerment.

## **Rebuilding Strength: Neeraja's Journey from Trauma to Healing**

### **Introduction**

Neeraja's (name changed) world shattered when her son attempted suicide, leaving her in deep emotional distress. Overwhelmed by guilt and pain, she found solace and support through VIMUKTHI. This case study highlights her transformation from a grieving mother to a mental health advocate, emphasizing the



power of survivor networks and emotional resilience.

**“I thought I had lost everything. But through VIMUKTHI’s support, I learned that healing is possible, and life can be rebuilt.” – Neeraja**

### **A Mother’s Worst Nightmare**

Neeraja, from Mahanadu Colony, Vijayawada, was devoted to her children. Her son, 18, fell in love with a neighbor’s daughter, but the relationship ended abruptly. Unable to cope with the rejection, he attempted suicide by consuming poison. Though he survived, the emotional scars remained. Watching his suffering pushed Neeraja into severe anxiety and emotional breakdowns.

### **VIMUKTHI’s Intervention: A Lifeline of Support**

Recognizing Neeraja’s distress, VIMUKTHI stepped in, offering emotional support and connecting her with a psychiatrist for counseling. Group therapy introduced her to other women with similar struggles, helping her process grief and find comfort in shared experiences.

### **Healing and Finding Purpose**

Through therapy, Neeraja learned coping mechanisms, supported her son’s recovery, and began participating in mental health awareness programs. She openly shared her story, breaking the stigma around depression and suicide prevention.

### **Becoming a Mental Health Advocate**

Determined to help others, Neeraja actively engaged in:

- **Suicide prevention workshops**, guiding families on recognizing distress signs.
- **Community support groups**, offering advice to struggling parents.
- **Mindfulness and stress management training**, promoting emotional well-being.

**“Pain doesn’t disappear overnight, but with the right support, it becomes easier to bear.” – Neeraja**

### **Overcoming Stigma and Creating Change**

Despite societal stigma, Neeraja remained committed to raising awareness. Through VIMUKTHI, she helped:

- 7 women seek professional counseling.
- 4 families identify early signs of depression.
- 2 suicide prevention workshops reach dozens of community members.
- Multiple families engage in mental health discussions.

### **Future Goals: Expanding Mental Health Awareness**

Neeraja envisions a dedicated mental health resource center offering:

- Free or low-cost counseling.
- Mental health first aid and crisis intervention.
- A safe space for emotional healing.

**“Healing is not forgetting; it is learning to live again.” – Neeraja**

### **Conclusion: A Story of Resilience and Hope**

Neeraja’s journey showcases the power of support, mental health awareness, and survivor-led healing. Through VIMUKTHI, she has transformed her grief into strength, ensuring no family endures trauma alone. Her advocacy continues to inspire communities to prioritize mental well-being, fostering a future where emotional health is valued as much as physical health.

Society for HELP Entire Lower and rural People (HELP) is an award-winning developmental organization committed to the protection of women and children from violence, sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Started by a group of service-minded professionals in 1994, HELP has been recognized as an important policy influencing organizations in the country. HELP envisions a stigma free society for survivors of trafficking and victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation (women in prostitution) where they could be able to access and enjoy their rights and entitlements. Strengthening accountability of the criminal justice system to survivors of human trafficking including efficient investigation by the police and prosecution of traffickers in source and destination areas by the court of law in protecting survivors' rights to rehabilitation and Elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against survivors of human trafficking in families, communities, institutions.



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