

Overcoming Perils of Consanguinity

Advocating for elimination of a harmful practice by example and an active self-help group (SHG) platform through the Adolescent Empowerment Programme in Visakhapatnam

Jogu Lakshmi's SHG grew to have over 20 active members



Jogu Lakshmi, a cheerful middle-aged SHG member in S Rayavaram Mandal of Visakhapatnam district was a playful girl in her childhood. Her grandfather was a patriarch whose word was law. When he directed her father to wed her to a maternal uncle in the same village, no one murmured in protest. The marriage was solemnised between 15-year-old Lakshmi and her 38-year-old uncle. The family was in debt and he offered to marry without dowry.

Her first daughter was physical challenged. Her family blamed Lakshmi until a village elder clarified that the nature of her consanguineous marriage¹ could be the reason. Lakshmi was devoted to her daughter and family.

When she got pregnant again, she feared for the unborn child's health. As her second daughter grew older, Lakshmi realised that her reflexes were slow and she took longer than other children her age to do things which was confirmed by the doctor.

Her husband lost his job and not being educated was left unemployed. Beset by guilt, her father offered to help. He introduced her to volunteers of the Adolescent Empowerment Programme being implemented in her Mandal. Having heard of success stories of community members enrolling in "second chance education" in open schools, he took Lakshmi for a meeting. Several girls shared their stories and suggested that she too complete her education. With their help, she enrolled for a BA degree from Ambedkar University and landed a job on completion. This gave her new hope. Once her family was stable and the girls were doing well in school, she became a member of a local SHG. With her consistent efforts, the SHG grew to have over 20 active members. Not only did it promote income generating activities but also advocated eliminating practices like consanguineous marriages.

The SHG group also found matches for Lakshmi's daughters after they completed their education. Today, both mother and daughters are living their lives with dignity and agency.



¹ Consanguineous marriages are between two individuals who are second cousins or closely related. Consanguinity is associated with miscarriages and genetic disorders.