

Child marriage was a common phenomenon in Darda Hind village in Tonk district of Rajasthan due to social norms and poor economic status of families. Twenty-three-year-old Rashami Sharma was a hardworking student and wanted to be a teacher. Her father encouraged her to fulfil her dreams and pursue her education. He promised her that as long as she gave studies her best shot, he would stand with her and provide all the support she needs and even convince family elders to postpone her marriage.

Rashami was certain that there were more girls like her who wanted to study but did not have the kind of family support she enjoyed. She saw the local *kishori samuh* (adolescent girls' group) as a vehicle to reach out to more girls with counselling, linkages and interventions. She became a member of the *samuh* and made a conscious decision to promote girl child education while also working on stopping child marriages and child labour.

Her *kishori samuh* has 25 adolescent girls as members, along with an Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) and ward members. They gather every month to take stock of any events in their

neighbourhood with respect to child marriages, child labour, school dropouts and demand for dowry. Being a zealous and enthusiastic member, Rashami has given an impetus to resolving many cases, be they related to child marriage, child labour or education of girls in the village.



Rashami and other members of the *kishori samuh* make door-to-door visits and inform families about several government schemes that could be availed of, along with counselling them on the ill

effects of child marriage and making children drop out of school. She has convinced many parents to make their children continue with their studies and reduce their domestic workload. She has also taken the lead in stopping many child marriages. Slowly, her group made a big impact in the village and child marriage cases have substantially reduced. Rashami is happy that these collective efforts are bearing fruit and has resolved to continue her good work.

**“ We stepped up our vigilance to identify girls who stopped attending school. We visited their homes and gauged the situation. If the family admitted to the upcoming wedding and were willing to postpone it till their daughter was ready for marriage, we left them to sort it out.**

**However, if the situation remained unchanged and we got news of the girl being unhappy, trapped and ill-treated, we approached the police to file an FIR. Often the Sarpanch and ASHA didi (local key influencers) joined us, making the entire exercise much more effective. We stopped four child marriages last year.**

