The Winding Road to Happiness

Case Studies of Women Survivors from Tehsil Sohawa, District Jhelum, Punjab, Pakistan
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# List of Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CHIP</td>
<td>Civil Society Human and Institutional Development Programmes</td>
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<td>HRA</td>
<td>Human Rights Activist</td>
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<td>LHW</td>
<td>Lady Health Worker</td>
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<td>VBG</td>
<td>Village Based Group</td>
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<td>WO</td>
<td>Woman Organisation</td>
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<td>WSV</td>
<td>Women Survivor of Violence</td>
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Preamble

Happiness: [hap-ee-nis] noun
   1. The state of well-being and contentment;
   2. Good fortune.¹

Since time immemorial, philosophers have wondered what exactly it is. Linguistically, the above definition satisfies this question entirely. But there is more depth to this universal concept. The literature that exists on the subject can be neatly divided into two broad categories: those that discuss happiness as a state of mind; and those that describe happiness as a means of welfare. For our present purposes, we are more interested in the latter.

What is happiness, then? Is it in a sense the idea that the life turns out to be good for the person leading it? Does happiness describe a life that is not fraught with difficulties and challenges? In that case, none of the women survivors of violence (WSV) that form part of this booklet should know what happiness feels like. Then why do they occasionally find a reason to smile, to laugh, to experience joy and contentment? Are those gestures and feelings not associated with this universal concept of happiness?

Undeniably, each and every one of those emotions is associated with this indefinable notion. But so far what they have experienced cannot be categorized as a life that has turned out good for them. They are victims of physical abuse and mental torture at the hands of their supposed families in a society which favors women oppression. But in the past two years, as they joined the programme by CHIP, they have embarked on their journey in search of happiness.

The programme aimed to enhance the socioeconomic condition of the WSV in a culturally sensitive manner. It attempted to encourage positively in the behaviour and approach of the women through counseling sessions, interactive theatre, puppetry and trainings on topics such as family law, women’s rights, anger management and conflict resolution. The desired final result of the programme was to live up to its name: the Happy Family programme.

The concept of happiness is an entirely subjective one; the word means different things for different people. For some it is financial stability, for others it is their peace of mind or the laughter of their children. It is a constant struggle: the struggle of a woman towards a better life and a happier family, the struggle of a wife towards supporting her husband and that of a mother towards her educating her children. No one could understand this better than the ten survivors that form part of this booklet.

Since the prime focus of the booklet is to document the changes each of these women underwent and tell the tale of their courageous journey towards achieving their own happiness, the identities of these women have been concealed. Their names have been changed and the ones used instead reflect their distinct character traits. All other details reflect the real life challenges that they have had to face over the years.

Each of the women survivors in this set of case studies tells a different story, a story of their empowerment as they rose above their fears to fight their battles, a story of their strive for livelihood to provide for themselves or a story of their successes and failures in the educational arena. Each of these case studies tells the tale of a woman standing halfway through on the long, winding road to happiness.

¹ Definition obtained from Merriam-Webster Dictionary.
Empowerment

The Content Wife

Survivor Profile

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<td>Type of Violence Faced</td>
<td>Physical and mental violence</td>
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CHIP Interventions

1. Capacity building (family law, women rights and interpersonal communication trainings);
2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions and member of Women Organisation);
3. Economic support (goat enterprise).

Radhiya could not recall much about the little fights she had with her husband. She could not recall much about her mother-in-law’s threats to kick her out of the house. Neither could she recall much about the night she found out her husband was involved with another woman. Nor later that month, when she found out he had married that woman. While most of the vivid details were lost, she did remember two things: he had hit her on each of those events regardless of whether it was her fault or his, just because he could do it and get away with it; and she had taken her frustration out on one of her six kids, just because she could do it and get away it. As she sat in the comfort of her, now happy, home a distant feeling of regret came and passed. She was just glad she was not the same anymore.

It was part of her daily routine to wake up for the morning prayer and then commence her chores for the day half an hour later: prepare breakfast, wake up her kids for school, clean the house, fetch water and feed the goats. On days when she did not have to rush, she took out a few minutes for herself and sat on the porch, sipping on a hot cup of tea to reminisce. She thought of the time when she fought with her husband every single day. Many times, if she had just paused and thought calmly for a minute or so, the fight could have been avoided all together. But her temper always got the best of her and in the end she was the one who suffered. It was not until she had met the local HRA that she even realized that she needed anger management. Even then, it was never a smooth ride. There were good days where she managed to control herself and bad days when everything became too overwhelming and she resorted to her old ways, shouting back at her husband and taking it out on her children. But two years later, she had learnt that whilst courage is what it took to stand up and speak, and in her case, shout, courage is also what it took to sit down and listen.

Often, the crowing of the rooster would break her day dream and she would rush into the room to make the bed and clear the mess the children had made. Clutching the bed sheet to her chest, she would stop again as another stream of consciousness would begin to flow. With a slightly cupped hand under her chin, she would sit at the edge of her bed and think of the time when she had left for her father’s home and brought her children with her as well. She had spent her days crying but then she had found a guiding voice. It told her crying would not get her what she wanted and that voice helped her to take a stand. The local HRA advised her to seek legal action and not return to her husband’s house without agreeing to her conditions on paper. Accordingly, she threatened to take action in court and seek expenses for their children from him. Scared, he had

She had learnt that whilst courage is what it took to stand up and speak, and in her case, shout, courage is also what it took to sit down and listen.
begged for forgiveness and for her to come back home. She remembered his exact words, “I promise I will not live with that other woman or give her money. I know people are saying I will take the children away from you but that is not true. Believe me; I am not as bad as they say I am…” In that moment when he had signed the divorce papers for that other woman, she had felt as if she had saved her herself and home.

A distant bleating and she would jump up and continue cleaning with über-speed. Ten minutes later she would step out of her house, look out towards the field and smack her lips together loudly. Three goats came galloping towards her knowing that they were about to be fed. She lovingly fed them the remnants of vines, hay and shrubs. As she sat by, she would remember the time when she worked all day long working as a maid in the nearby house only for Rs. 1,000 per month. She had tried to talk to them and increase her pay but in vain. Forced by necessity to make ends meet, she had continued to slave away until CHIP provided her with a means of livelihood: two goats. She looked after them and nurtured them earning a stable income of Rs. 3,000 every month. Gradually, the goats increased in number, and while one of them had died due to the winter cold, she still had three to look after. And she looked after them well. She knew that the harder she worked, the more secure her and her children’s future was; this was her key to break free of this hand-to-mouth condition.

As the day would end and her children and husband returned home, she would look to the sinking sun and think of the new day to come: thirty two years of her life and what seemed like a mountain of trouble had passed and there was still a long way to go. In that moment, she would feel content thinking to herself, “It was better this way with my husband and kids: a happy family. All was well.”
Empowerment

The Mother Cat

**Survivor Profile**

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**CHIP Interventions**

1. Capacity building (family law, women rights and interpersonal communication trainings);
2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions and member of VBG and Women Organisation);
3. Economic support (tuck shop).

The Musalihat-e-Anjuman member led her in to the room and asked her to take a seat while she waited. She adjusted her red dupatta\(^2\) as she sat down and ushered her four year old daughter towards her. Her daughter came skipping and crawled up in her lap. She kissed her cheek and smiled as her daughter’s naughty laughter reverberated across the room. Her daughter seemed to be one of the only few things that helped cheer her up, the rest was simply bleak. She longed for colour, for stability and for happiness. But today, she knew that the happiness she longed for did not rely on staying in her husband’s house. She knew better now than to believe in such orthodox views. She knew that if it was true, she would not still be crying.

She looked around the room, a small wooden table with two small tote chairs, a computer on one side and a large brown mud pot with money plant on the other. Right then, sitting there, she experienced déjà vu and a sense of familiarity set in, like she had been here before: the same woman but just eight years younger sitting in a police station. She had tried to explain that her husband was a drunkard and an addict, he hit her at every little thing, his mother supported him and at times even prompted him to hit her, she was threatened and tortured but was forced to endure it. But somehow the words had failed to formulate themselves and while it was crystal clear to her, the police officers failed to see the real picture. She returned home, empty-handed and the beatings continued. She spent her days disheartened, crying and bitter, confined to the walls of her, in fact her husband’s, house.

But déjà vu was merely an anomaly of the memory, a false impression that the experience is being recalled. And rightly so: she was no longer the same suppressed woman sitting at the police station scared of her in-laws. With CHIP as her crutch, she began her slow journey towards recovery and betterment. Two years later, she was a part of the local VBG and the Woman Organisation working in the area. She could articulate her feelings and her resolve was much stronger now: she will not tolerate her children being subjected to the same treatment she had. She was aware of her rights and last night her endurance threshold had been breached. She had tried again and again to reconcile their differences and live with him peacefully. The local HRA had tried to reason with her husband on numerous occasions but her husband had always managed to answer back with profanities. His unchanging attitude, his drug addictions, senseless fights with her, their kids and the neighbours had made it impossible.

\(^2\) A long scarf that a woman wears around her head or shoulders
The member returned taking his seat at the desk, reached out for the files and mumbled a greeting. Without looking up he asked, “Name?” She replied, “Nasirah,” to which he asked again, “And age?” She answered, “34.” The member finally looked up and examined her face as if counting her wrinkles; by that count she looked 50, worn down by the worries, beatings and her physical disability. “And what brings you here today, Nasirah?” the member asked. There was a moment of silence then she heaved a sigh and began, “My husband beat my son and broke his nose – just for money. I came back from the tuck shop given to me by CHIP and he asked for me money again. I work day and night and manage to save Rs. 1,000 in profit. It is for my children’s expenses not for his alcohol and charas. I want to see him jailed! How dare he touch my children?” her voice getting louder with each word, her back arched like a mother cat getting ready to attack.

The member smiled at her determination and asked, “And have you tried everything to resolve the issue?” She narrowed her eyes and answered, “I have spent half my life trying to make it work. He is not changing his ways and I do not see a future with the man that he is. But my children will not suffer the way I have. They will go to school, even my daughters,” to which the member asked, “And what about the shop?” She raised her chin and replied, “The shop is mine and it will go where ever I go. I will expand it no matter where I am,” her business acumen reflecting in her eyes. The member nodded, taking note of what she had just said. He looked up and asked her one final question, “Are you sure?” And she replied, repeating herself, “I will not let my children suffer.”
Empowerment

The Rights Fighter

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“Listen to your husband! If he is asking for the jewellery he bought you in return for the dowry, give it to him. No woman, or man, in our family has ever washed their dirty laundry in public and gone to court. He is your husband after all. You must tolerate it for the sake of keeping your house together,” her father spat in anger. The disbelief on Kebira’s face was obvious as her own father ranted off against her. But what more could be expected of him? He, too, is a man after all; how natural of him to support their ‘superior’ kind. It was in that moment in time that the 33 year old mother decided to raise her only son differently, to teach him to respect women. And that was the difference between the old and the new her. She was not scared of raising her child alone; in fact, she was glad there was no chance of her son falling into his father’s footsteps.

While Kebira was still married to him she clearly recalled half her days being spent waiting for her husband to return home. Since he had never agreed to their marriage, he spent most of his time dallying with other women. Her mother-in-law had made it a hobby to lock her out of the house in an attempt to somehow drive her away. She finally decided to the leave the house when she discovered a photograph of another woman in her husband’s wallet only to return to the prison two years later for the sake of her child. When she demanded a separate home for herself, her husband took her to another house without any furniture or groceries and told her to live there if she could. Her plea for pocket money was dismissed almost instantaneously. To add to the humiliation she had already faced at the hands of her in-laws, her husband accused her of being a woman of loose character when she broke the news that she was expecting a second baby. Enraged, she returned to her father’s home resolving never to return.

She had joined the Happy Family programme in the hope that she would be able to resolve her issues. But the awareness she received with regards to her legal rights made her change her mind completely. With some legal assistance, she sued her husband in court for child support and receives Rs. 2,500 from him every month which go towards raising her two children. But having lived with him for so many years, she knows that her husband showed her income to be much less than it actually is so that he would only have to pay a small amount towards child maintenance. Her self-confidence, having attained new heights, has allowed her to step out of the house without hesitation and fight her case with all the

Each time she thought of the atrocities she had to bear in her husband’s house ‘for the sake of preserving her home, she resolved to make her son a better man, a man that differentiated between good and bad, not male and female.
strength she can muster. She is currently trying to obtain his real pay slip from him employers to use as evidence against him in court. Simultaneously, she has also filed a case with the Union Council in order to reclaim her dowry. In settlement, her husband’s family is demanding back the jewellery she received as a gift on their marriage but legally, both the dowry and the jewellery is hers and she is asserting her right to that property.

Two years into the programme, Kebira’s determination and enthusiasm has made her an ideal HRA. She has used her knowledge to create awareness regarding the legal rights and roles of women and the significance of these rights amongst other survivors. Events such as theatre performances, puppet shows and Eid parties were organised to include and integrate the survivors into society and give them a chance to grow and develop. Vice versa, her position as an HRA motivates and strengthens her personality further. Additionally, she works as a lady health worker to help support the little family that she has. She has devoted her life towards working for her children, to educate them, improve their future and raise them responsibly.

She often wondered how her children would grow up to be. She wondered whether or not her son would be able to differentiate between right and wrong, whether or not her daughter would have a happy life, a successful marriage, a loving husband. The thought of her son becoming a man like his father or grandfather plagued her and each time she thought of the atrocities she had to bear in her husband’s house ‘for the sake of preserving her home’ she resolved to make her son a better man, a man that differentiated between good and bad, not male and female.
Livelihood

The Breadwinner

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<td>2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions);</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Economic support (ladies’ shop).</td>
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“A mani, your child is crying. Why don’t you look after him properly,” her mother-in-law bellowed from the other room. She left the heap of dirty clothes she was carrying in the middle of the veranda and rushed to the room where she had left her son sleeping. She picked him up as he hungrily put his fists in his mouth. She had fed him an hour ago, how could he be hungry again? Right then, another voice called her, “Make me chai³. All this noise is giving me a migraine.” Why could he not make tea for himself? It’s not like he has done much other than laze around on the charpoy⁴ all day long, she thought to herself. Right then, the pressure cooker whistled. She rushed towards the vegetable stew cooking on the stove, but alas! It was already burnt: yet another ‘valid’ reason for taunts coming her way. She heaved a sigh and bent over to save what she could of the stew and herself for today…

Making her way to the first training session being organized by CHIP, Amani had two things in mind: to change herself; and improve her future prospects. She was frustrated with her condition, like a pressure cooker, building up inside her, with no vent and no means of escape. After matriculating, she had begun teaching in the local school but her mother-in-law soon complained of the neglect with which she was handling the household chores. Housebound, she began to tutor children at home. Her husband left his job in Rawalpindi and returned home permanently. With nothing to do all day, his favourite activity was to pick on his wife. With no proper source of income in the house, their economic worries became the main bone of contention between them. Senseless fights and shouting: it was a free show for everyone in the village to enjoy, every single day. And the end result? Like the stew, she was left burnt and boiling inside.

Looking back one and a half years later, she saw the change in herself that she had so desperately longed for: all those anger management sessions which had taught her to control her anger at the right time and convey her point of view later when heat of the moment had subsided and the attitude building sessions that helped boost her self-esteem. She had been given a chance to talk and enjoy herself; she found a friend for herself in the local HRA and when they were not meeting for HRA meetings, they were at each other’s houses talking about random things. She had never thought

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³ Tea made by boiling tea leaves and milk
⁴ A bed consisting of a frame strung with tapes or a light rope
in her 28 years of life that she would play musical
chairs at an Eid party and manage to come third as well. Her irritable nature was gradually changing
and others around her, most importantly her husband, could see it as well. Day after day, one
training session after the other, their fights became
infrequent and she knew very well that her
changing demeanour was a major reason. She often admitted, jokingly, that she was much more
sensible now; but she knew that it was true as well.

But there was another significant factor behind these resolved differences: a stable income - CHIP had
helped her set up a ladies’ shop. She was not business-minded at all and handling a new business with
two young children became even more challenging. But she managed to pull through and her hard
work began to pay, literally. Her profits, after paying off the expenses, came down to Rs. 2,500 to Rs.
3,000 per month. But this was not enough: she wanted a new home for herself, a better future for her
children and she saw her shop as the means to that end. A shop in the city: yes, that is what she
wanted. A family business, expanded: she had decided she would invest her husband’s pension in the
shop, buy more products that her customers demanded, sell more, earn more. That was her plan. And
she knew that till the time her economic woes were at bay, her family life was stable. She was
happier, and so was her husband.

Looking back one and a half years later, she saw the change in others around her as well. Her husband
was content, so were her children and while she aimed for a lot more in the future, she too was
content with the present.

AMANI
Meaning: desires, aspirations, wishes.

The photographs below show her hard at work
at her ladies’ shop.
Livelihood

The Financial Crutch

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CHIP Interventions

1. Capacity building (family law, women rights, anger management and interpersonal communication trainings);
2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions);
3. Economic support (tuck shop).

If it was not haram⁵, I would have committed suicide a long time ago,” this was the thought that epitomized the extent of her miseries. Saabirah had hobbled her way through 37 years of life, disengaged and distraught. The crutch she used for support could somewhat ease the physical pain of walking but it did not help lessen the emotional scars left by her disability and everything else that followed suit. After sustaining an injury to her spinal cord, she had become physically disabled in her leg. Her disability came with a string of repercussions, social withdrawal was one of them as she stopped meeting neighbours and participating in the rest of the events in society. She had never wanted to get married after this condition but she was forced into wedlock by her parents. As a traditional family with orthodox views, her in-laws never really accepted a disabled woman as their daughter-in-law and inevitably, she returned to her parents’ home five years ago. But in all this time, she found a reason to live for: her 9 year old daughter.

She had only ever wanted to stay peacefully with her family without any problems. To which, people often replied, “Why don’t you resolve your differences and go back to your husband’s home?” But, how could she resolve an issue which did not exist? How could she explain to them that there no reason for any differences between them? How could she explain that there really was no apparent reason behind the slaps and profanities being hurled her way? Or, was there? The only answer she reached after pondering, day after day, month after month, year after year, was her disability. Her despair with her condition increased tenfold when one day, out of the blue, she discovered that her husband had remarried. She realized that it was true, there was no issue. He just did not want to live with her. How can you force someone to live with you when they did not want to? It was strange that she had been forced to marry him without her consent but such an arrangement could not have worked the other way round. She often wondered whether a disabled woman, like herself, should get married. No, not if this is what her inevitable fate would be, at least not in the conditions she was forced to marry.

Two years later, her views about her disability had not changed much but she had embraced it; a major reason for it were the training sessions that she attended with the eagerness of child discovering something new. The local HRA was her confidante guiding her through some of the most troubled times of her life. She joined the programme with a fear of talking in front of “bigger people” and has since then morphed herself into a businesswoman capable of bearing her daughter’s expenses.

She joined the programme with a fear of talking in front of ‘bigger people’ and has since then morphed herself into a businesswoman capable of bearing her daughter’s expenses.

⁵ Forbidden by Islamic law.
‘bigger people’ and has since then morphed herself into a businesswoman capable of bearing her daughter’s expenses. The tuck shop in front of her house was a small establishment carrying vegetables and groceries worth Rs. 15,000. Her capabilities have allowed her to earn enough profits to send her daughter to school and fulfill her basic needs; she is no longer dependent on her mother and brother for financial support in raising her daughter. She attributed her success partly to her ability to deal with customers effectively owing to the interpersonal communications training sessions that she had received. The other part, she attributes to her fair dealing and competitive prices which has allowed for customer loyalty to develop. And in all this, where did she find the motivation to work hard, hiding all her past pains: her daughter; and a brighter future for her. Now, all she wants is for her daughter to continue studying and attain her own financial independence.

Every afternoon, after lunch, she puts all her household chores on hold and shuts her tuck shop for an hour. With a waddling gait, she makes her way to the veranda where seven young children can be found sitting on a ragged mat in the corner. She takes her seat at the front and begins to teach them how to read the Quran; not for money, not as a means of income but because she finds a certain sense of solace in the laughter of children mixed with the pleasant rhythm of the verses. Often at that time, her daughter returns home from school and a small nod accompanied with mumbled greeting and smile is exchanged. And for the first time in the whole day, she puts behind her miseries, looks up at the sky, raises her hands and thanks the Lord for all his blessings.
“Tolerate the little things he does that you don’t like. Fighting will not solve anything; it will just aggravate the situation further. Talk to him when he cools down. See how much that will help,” she advised her fellow co-worker. She knew exactly how things could turn out when everyone loses their temper in the heat of the moment. “It’s easy to say all of this. His attitude has gone from bad to worse; I can’t live with a man who didn’t even come to the hospital visit his own newborn child,” her friend answered back, her voice quivering as tears started streaming down her cheeks. She heaved a sigh and answered, “If things are really that bad I think you should talk to Noureen. She’s the local HRA; I think she will be able to help you and give advice. She was the one who helped me as well.”

As Sameeha listened to her friend’s story, she reminisced the time, one and a half years ago, when she went through the same thing. “Why don’t you drop him to the school near your work in the morning and bring him back with you?” she argued her agitation apparent in her words. “No. He can just go to the same school he goes to now. He will be fine,” he replied back casually, shrugging his shoulders. “Why don’t you understand? His life is at stake. He is being bullied everyday by those boys. They are taking revenge for their father’s enmity with you,” she pleaded in vain. “He will be fine,” he answered with finality in his tone; and with that he walked out. Later, she had overheard her mother-in-law and husband talking to each other in hushed voices. “Explain it to her very clearly: he will go to this school only,” her mother-in-law spat. “Yes, mother. I will tell her again if you want,” he replied, like the obedient son that he was. That night as she lay in bed alone, she thought of everything she had been through: she had spent her entire married life at the mercy of her mother-in-law; her husband had never given her expenses; everything she earned she had given to her husband; the house she was living in had been made by her hard-earned money but she lived in it like an uninvited guest, waiting to be kicked out at any moment.

The decision to leave her husband’s house had been a rash one and she chose to return for the sake of her children. After entering the programme with CHIP, she had learnt of tolerance and had tried to apply it to her life. But his constant attempts to cheat money out of her drove her away for the final time. Her decision to leave the second time was a well-thought out one and this time her resolve was strong. She had found, within the programme, a vent for herself, an avenue for discussion, she had learnt from the experiences of other women and she was not willing to
compromise on what she rightfully deserved. She did not want money for her sake or support, she had never needed it; she only wanted her husband to understand his responsibilities towards his children and that was why she decided to file a case against him seeking child maintenance funds. That night, after her colleague left, as she lay in bed alone, she thought of everything that had changed: she was no longer dependent on her husband for expenses; what she earned as an LHW was hers to keep and for the sake of her children; she understood what her legal rights were and she had somehow mustered the inner strength to fight for it.

But only one thing remained unchanged: she still felt like an uninvited guest. Even though she lives in her parent’s house, there is a nagging feeling that it was not her own. She had made a house for herself once, she could make it again. She has made it her life’s goal to make a house for herself and her children where they could rightfully say, “This is our home!” She would serve their needs, as both a father and mother, earning by day and nurturing by night. She wanted to see them happy, well-educated, both her daughter and her son. The 31 year old mother had decided a long time ago that she would raise both her son and her daughter as equals. Not only did she want a brighter future for her son, she wanted to see her daughter well-settled and independent. She would not let her daughter fall victim to the societal dogmas that had plagued her and so many other women.
Livelihood

The Supportive Wife

Survivor Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Violence Faced</td>
<td>Mental torture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHIP Interventions

1. Capacity building (family law, women rights and interpersonal communication trainings);
2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions);
3. Economic support (ladies’ shop).

“S

o, could any of you tell me what comes to your mind when you think of a happy family?” the woman in the front asked. Rafidah instantly thought of financial stability. Not daring to speak, she looked around the room. An awkward pause; a few seconds later three reluctant hands went up in the air. She sat in a corner, gripping the ends of her shirt, avoiding eye contact so that she would not be asked to answer. She was a 30 year old woman but she did not have the confidence to talk in front of so many people. What if she answered incorrectly? No, no, no, it was a good idea to just listen for today. She had breathed a sigh of relief as she stepped out, having successfully avoided all questions for the day. But she had enjoyed herself. She resolved to attend as many of the workshops as she could.

Two years later, she was proud to say that she had kept her promise, having attended all the workshops and training sessions. One training session after the other, she began to speak as well, voice out her opinions, answer. As her confidence with herself and CHIP established she began to open up as well: the financial trouble she and her husband were facing; the violence she had to bear day after day; the mountains that were created out of molehills every other day with meaningless fights. She had found an avenue for discussion, to expel her frustration and it was not until she talked to the para-counsellors that she realised she was in need of anger management. As the weeks went by, she began to feel the change in her husband’s attitude, his softened tone, less frequent fights. She attributed this to her changed demeanour. She had learnt to argue less, resolve more. She stopped answering back when her husband was angry and started talking to him about their problems when his mood was better. Fighting was not the solution, it never was; she had to win him over with her manners and to an extent, she already had. She had been a part of the Woman’s Organisation before the Happy Family programme but it was not until now that she realised that all the wells and roads could not improve society, the change had to come from within, people had to change their mentality.

But her inability to control her anger was not the only cause behind the problems that threatened the happiness in her home. Every fight between the two began and end on the same note: her husband’s unemployment. With no source of income and six mouths to feed, her life was a constant challenge. They relied on agriculture to satisfy their basic needs, but only barely. With hardly any profits, their condition was entirely hand-to-mouth. She knew that if her needs were met
husband found some other work, their problems would eventually go away. His frustration with his unemployment was apparent in the slaps that were hurled her way every time she had suggested that she could get some work. And why would he not react? After all, his male ego was at stake. This was the biggest challenge she had faced when CHIP helped her set up a ladies’ shop. Coupled with this was her lack of business direction, which was why she was unable to earn anything at all initially. But in the past three months, profitability had improved to Rs. 2,000 and above all, her understanding of the business had increased. Impressively, she had retained stock worth Rs. 30,000 and the new stock that she had purchased was in accordance with the needs of her customers. However, the progress that she had made in the past three months made her realise that she still had a lot to learn and a long way to go.

In the past two years, she had seen the domino effects of her perseverance and determination. She had struggled with an unemployed husband and had found a way to supplement his income and easing his worries. Needless to say, she had managed this new business, without neglecting any of her household duties, all the while being a good wife and a good mother. But the most remarkable change that she had seen in her life was the one that she had brought within herself. She had learnt of tolerance and conflict resolution. She had reaped the benefits of both these traits. And above all, as she saw the changes in her husband, she realised that she had reached a milestone on the long winding road to happiness.

RAFIDAH
*Meaning: support*

The photograph below shows her updating her cash register for her shop.
**Education**

# The Shy Preacher

## Survivor Profile

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Violence Faced</strong></td>
<td>Physical and mental violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHIP Interventions</strong></td>
<td>1. Capacity building (family law, women rights and interpersonal communication trainings); 2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions and member of Women Organisation); 3. Economic support (works as an HRA and poultry enterprise).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“**A**"nd before I end today’s session, I would like to remind all of you: study. Study as hard as you can! They can take away your money, they can steal your freedom but your education is a treasure that they can never take away from you,” she added to a light applause. Sharmeen said her goodbyes and made her way down the stairs from her office. With her position as an HRA and tall, lean figure, she appeared dominating to those who did not know her. At five feet eleven inches, her broad shoulders, sharp features and apparently strong posture could have fooled anyone. But if looks can ever be deceptive, they were now. No one realized that behind this physical austerity was a timid 28 year old girl with a voice that had never found the courage to speak in front of her husband until about two years ago.

Banned from almost all social interactions, she was under the strict control of two men in the house, her husband and her father-in-law. Her situation was made worse by the mother of her husband’s second wife, who looked for excuses to instigate her husband against her. Not that she had needed to, of course. Her husband had proved his capabilities to keep his wife “under control” on numerous occasions. But it was not the slaps and verbal profanities that affected her: it was the constant threat of divorce hanging over her head like a sword that mentally tortured her. The house reeked of double standards and injustice; appallingly enough, even her movement at social gatherings was restricted. Day after day, fight after fight, her confidence level shattered into ever smaller bits. And the biggest grievance of all, she had not pursued her education after intermediate college. Her dream of obtaining an undergraduate degree lay unfulfilled as she remained confined within the boundaries of her husband’s house.

But as they say, change is the law of life and no one time remains the same. She was given an opportunity to bloom under the programme conducted by CHIP. She discovered a new source of motivation: the females working under the programme. She strived to be like them, to be one of them. And her wish came true, as she was made an HRA under the project. Her role as an HRA allowed her to move beyond the confines of her home and share her experiences and life stories with others who had undergone the same rash treatment she had. It provided her with the vent she so desperately needed, to share her problems with other. Conversely, it gave her an opportunity to learn from others experiences, hear their stories. All this while, the role as an HRA was also a means of income for her: Rs. 1,500 every month which she saved for herself; to one day, achieve the goal she strived for: education.

“They can take away your money, they can steal your freedom but your education is a treasure they can never take away from you.”
Now, two years later, she sat on the charpoy next to her husband and shared with him the brilliant news. She had completed a bachelor’s degree in arts from Allama Iqbal Open University. The glee on her face was apparent; this was a dream come true. A slow smile appeared on her husband’s face, the pride reflecting in his eyes as he called out to his parents and boasted, “My wife passed her B.A. examinations!” She realised in that moment the true importance of education: the respect that was accompanied with it. She decided pursue her education further, obtain a masters degree before beginning her career as a teacher. She had managed to save Rs. 8,000 from the poultry enterprise given to her by CHIP; only Rs. 2,000 more and her entire fees for the degree programme would be taken care of. Her financial independence, this newfound sense of freedom, made the taste of success seem even sweeter. She had not asked her sister for me like old times, she had done this all on her own. And no one could take that away from her.

As she concluded the HRA session for the week, she remembered the resilience she had faced from her home and neighbours. And what was the reason for complaint? The women were getting out of control. She remembered the troubles with which she had attained this position and thought of the troubles that still lay before her. Then she added, “There is no difference between a boy child and a girl child. Educate your daughters. It is of utmost importance.”

**SHARMEEN**

*Meaning: shy*

The photograph below shows her feeding her chickens.
Education

The Dreamer

**Survivor Profile**

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<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Type of Violence Faced</strong></td>
<td>Mental torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHIP Interventions</strong></td>
<td>1. Capacity building (family law, women rights, anger management and interpersonal communication trainings); 2. Social inclusion (mobilization session); 3. Economic support (works as an HRA).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“N

o, you cannot go to college and that is my final decision,” his words echoed through the phone and pulsed through Rahaf. Without realising, tears started streaming down her cheeks and she barely whispered back, “As you wish.” And with that she heard a clicking voice and the disconnected tone as he slammed the phone shut. It was miraculous that her husband managed to control her every move all the way from England. But if miracles were possible, she truly wished for one for herself: to be able to control her tears. But a slightly raised voice was enough to send her self-confidence into tatters and her voice to start trembling. She knew it had been a bad idea to ask her husband about pursuing her education further but she had not expected an absolute rejection on his part. Did he expect her to stay bound to her parent’s home for the rest of her life, stand when he ordered and sit at his demand? She wanted to say all this to him, but the words would just dissolve in her mouth, every single time.

He was her first cousin. She remembered the excitement in the house when the marriage proposal had come; she had been plagued with questions and instructions. Will you go to England? Will you meet the Queen? Do not dress like the English women there. Little did they know that she was not excited about visiting a foreign land; she only wanted a peaceful marriage, love, happiness. But dreams are made to be broken. Her sister and mother-in-law treated her with spite and her husband avoided her. After a short stay, her husband and his family returned to England leaving her behind to fend for herself. He hardly ever spoke to her, and when he did, she would wish he had not. He did not look after her and she did not have the courage to ask him for expenses. A scolding on his part and silence and apology on hers, this was her routine. When she had joined the Happy Family programme, she had been reduced to nothing but a 25 year old zombie. Her actions were controlled by her husband; her decisions were made by her mother.

One year into the programme, Rahaf’s progress speaks for itself. She often attributes her motivation to pursue higher education to the counselling sessions she attended. It was not until she heard of the importance of good education that she decided to opt for a bachelor’s degree. The biggest opposition she faced was from her in-laws but her determination did not wane. She realised that arguing with her husband was futile and decided to show her in-laws the different pictures from the various group activities organised by CHIP in order to convince them. At last, they agreed. Ecstatic, she obtained admission in Allama Iqbal Open
University for a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree. Since then, she has completed English language and Computer Skills courses independent of her university studies and very proudly uses Skype to talk to her husband now. In the last one year, much of the havoc in her married life has been resolved and she is preparing to set sails for England to live with her husband and his family in Nottingham. She only recently completed a beautician course to add to her employability skill set which will allow her to obtain financial autonomy if she finds work in England.

With her mother and sister as members of the local Woman Organisation, she decided to work as HRA helping other survivors like herself by creating awareness about their rights, roles and responsibilities and in turn, assisting in boosting their self-confidence. While it may not seem like much to others, it was a milestone for her as she proudly admitted that she makes her own decisions now, not her mother, not her sister, not her husband. This confidence reflects in her day to day dealings as well, as she feels more comfortable in recognizing and solving her personal issues. With a hearty laughter, she admitted that a year ago, either she did not speak or when she spoke, it was mostly unnecessary. She identified this as a major reason why she had so many differences with her husband. This newfound chattiness and confidence has already produced a good result: her husband has begun to support her financially and has been sending money to her for expenses for the past four months. It may not seem like much, but it certainly is a promising start.

Every time she thinks of her future, there is a fear of leaving behind everything she has known for the past 27 years of her life and settling in a foreign land. But accompanied with this is a sense of contentment as she thinks of living with her husband for the first time after marriage. For now, she has found a reason to dream again.
The Empathetic Mother

Survivor Profile

| Age |  
| Education | Illiterate |  
| Disability | None |  
| Marital Status | Separated |  
| Type of Violence Faced | Physical and mental torture |  
| CHIP Interventions | 1. Capacity building (family law, women rights and interpersonal communication trainings);  
2. Social inclusion (mobilization sessions and member of Women Organisation);  
3. Economic support (works as an HRA). |

Even though it was her right, she had always hesitated when asking her husband for expenses. “I was… um… thinking that if you could give me a little bit of money… I could buy pay for school for the kids,” she asked, her eyes glued to her feet, not daring to look up at her husband. She could feel his eyes boring a hole through her as he glared at her. “When will you learn? Or do you really want me to kick you out of the house again?” he answered as he slammed the door shut behind him, leaving her to her miseries in the empty, darkened room. She curled up on the bed, hugging her knees as she cried herself to sleep hoping that the next day would bring some ray of hope in the darkness engulfing her husband.

Being forced to return to her father house was a routine. In the past nineteen years of her marriage, she had spent only five years with her husband. Her brother married his sister and in exchange she was handed over to him for marriage. Her in-laws had never really accepted her as a part of their home and it was not long after their marriage that fights started between her mother-in-law and husband. But her life went from bad to worse after her brother divorced her sister-in-law. Putting all physical and verbal abuse aside, her husband found a new way of punishing her. She was sent to her parent’s home permanently without a divorce but with a warning. One toe out of line and the divorce papers stored in the cupboard would be thrown at her face. She spent her days with a sword hanging over her head for the sake of preserving her home and her reputation in a society hostile to single mothers. It was after this incident that she decided not to ask her husband for expenses again.

She regretted her decision to take her daughter out of school even more every time she had to ask some other HRA to write a report for her and she had to wait for hours in the end for them to get free before they could write it for her.

When Afifah entered the Happy Family programme, she was stifled and suppressed. For someone overlooking her life from a distance, not much had changed in the two years since. She was still separated from her husband and the constant threat of divorce continued to mentally torture her. But in her own right, she had achieved a milestone. Having received trainings regarding her family law and women rights law, she realised that she was entitled to receive money for expenses from her husband. Undeniably, it was a bold step on her part to contact a Musalihat-e-Anjuman member to advise her regarding this right. Ignoring her husband’s threats to divorce her, she has resolved to take a stand for the sake of her children. She has resolved to file a case for child support against her husband so her children can receive, from their father, what they rightfully
It does not seem like much, but for her to muster the strength to even decide to go to court is a positive sign.

The financial troubles she encountered due to lack of support from her husband meant that she was not able to send her daughter to school. But working as an HRA for her village she realised that without education her daughter would always have to dependent on others like she was. Her motivation to educate her daughter grew tenfold when she saw other HRAs writing and she could not having never gone to school in her life. She regretted her decision to take her daughter out of school even more every time she had to ask some other HRA to write a report for her and she had to wait for hours in the end for them to get free before they could write it for her. With this in mind, and for a brighter future for her daughter, she decided to enroll her in school where she could complete her secondary education and matriculate.

For someone who knew her well enough, the timid woman that she once had been was slowly changing, blossoming into a woman stronger and more aware of her rights, roles and responsibilities. She had strengthened her resolve and decided to fight for the rights of her children. Even though she was concerned about her two sons, she was more concerned about her daughter. She had learnt from her mistakes, she was not going to let her daughter make the same ones and the first one was: education.

Afifa
*Meaning: Modest, Chaste*