



PLUS

Case studies May 2009

Beed

This is the case of one PLHIV woman who has fallen into stigma and discrimination not only from society but also from herself and her family. Puja (her name has been changed for her security) has to fight for her freedom and also for her life. This makes her ask a question to God, why! For this case study I personally interacted with her and think it should be written. Presence of mind I learn is a part of life and also we must think positively.

Puja is a 22 years old young lady living with HIV for the last two years with her little daughter named Rani. Her life is full of movement that she doesn't think about.

When she was a child she was living with her joint family. All property rights were held by her uncle. Her father was the younger brother and a son of second mother. All property went in her uncle's favour. For some years life went well but when Puja got to 8th standard at the age of 16 her uncle decides he wants her to marry a 38 year old man. This man had been married before but was divorced. He wanted to marry Puja. Puja did not want to marry him but under pressure from her uncle she married him. She later found out that the man gave her uncle 50,000 rs as a present when they got married. Only two months after the wedding she fell pregnant and two months after that her husband died.

She is frustrated that at only 16 years she becomes widowed. Her in-laws sent her back to her father's home to live. She did not know how her husband died but the village people told her that her husband died of AIDS. She gave birth to a sweet baby. At that time she found out that she herself was HIV positive and she thought about suicide. Her misery was made worse because she realised that her uncle had known that her husband was HIV positive before the wedding. Just for some rupees she was betrayed by him. She asked her uncle why!

After her husband's death she felt hopeless and was contemplating suicide. Finally she found out about the Network of Beed People with HIV in Beed where she was motivated through counselling and support services. She realised that she was not the only one who was infected and there are so many other people living with their HIV positive status. The immediate reaction that came to her mind was "if I die who will take care of my daughter?" She then joined our organisation as a peer educator. She received Peer Educator training to be part of the Preventing Parent To Child Transmission project as a peer educator.

Meanwhile, she had to sell off her husband's shop and borrow money from others to clear the debts incurred for the treatment of her husband.

She has been a ray of hope for the HIV Positive people who still live in isolation with stigma and discrimination. She now has some land on which she plans to build a small house of her own. She is busy in creating awareness among all people about HIV/AIDS and helping many more people. She has forgotten that she is HIV positive. With a smiling face she says "an HIV positive person can live a very happy and normal life like anyone else, and the community has a vital role to play in this regard". Let her inspiration be a candle in the lives of those who live in fear and darkness because of their HIV positive status.

Principal issue: Property rights for women.

**Jitendra Surywanshi,
District Social Worker, Beed**

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Kolhapur

Uma Hajare is a 41 year old widow living with her parents. She married Pankaj Hajare before she was 12 Years old. Pankaj was already married with Sunita, but Sunita was physically unable to give birth to a child. Because of that, Pankaj married again with Uma. Uma gave birth to a boy child within a year. She was living with her husband and son in Ratnagiri and Pankaj was working as a teacher in a school at Ratnagiri. After five years, Pankaj fell ill and was tested for HIV. Unfortunately, this test came out positive. Pankaj passed away within a few months. Then Uma and her son came back to her parents' house. She also tested HIV positive but fortunately, her son is not positive.

Uma was the second wife of Pankaj. Pankaj had been married with Sunita but the marriage was childless. Uma's child son is the only child of Pankaj. After his death, Uma came back to her parents. Because of that, her in-laws started creating problems and denied her any share in the property. After the death of Pankaj, his first wife had been able to get his pension as well as a share in his property. Uma is also eligible for a share in his pension and property. However, her in-laws and Sunita denied her any share. After six months, Sunita also passed away. Before she died, she put the name of a boy as a legatee of her property. Uma was shocked to hear this because she knew that there had been no child born to Sunita. Uma is certain that this is a plan by her in-laws to avoid giving her her property.

Uma sought the help of the Kolhapur district. We referred her to 'Mahila Dakshata Samiti' who try to settle disputes. They supported her fight against her in-laws. Mahila Dakshata Samiti sent a notice to her in-laws. This notice made her in-laws more determined than ever and again they denied giving her any share in the property. So Uma filed her report at the police station and was ready to fight legally with her in-laws. For the last year, this case has been filed at the Civil Court but it has not yet come before the Court.

The District Network of Kolhapur (DLN) continues to support her for her psychological fitness as well as giving her the chance to work for us as an outreach worker in a project run by the DLN. We also support her in her dealings with Mahila Dakshata Samiti as well as supporting her in her fight in the Civil Court against her in-laws. With the help of counselling, we made her psychologically strong and enabled her to have positive thinking and positive living.

Currently, Uma has her case filed for her right to an equal share in her late husband's pension and property. She is hoping this will be heard by the court and settled very soon.

Since Uma started working in our DLN as an outreach worker, she has regularly visited the DLN. Now she is no longer working on the project but still she visits regularly and talks to us about her problem and the progress of this case. We have supported her for this case and we are planning to ask the District Legal Cell for a faster resolution of this case and allow her to get her rightful share in property and pension.

Principal issue: Property rights for women

Rahin, District Social Worker, Kolhapur

