

CASE STUDY & REFLECTION

BEYOND THE VERDICT

*A Child's Journey Towards Justice
and Healing*



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Trigger warning: This case study contains references to child sexual violence, coercion, threats, and trauma. Some readers may find the content emotionally distressing. The information is presented solely for educational and documentation purposes while maintaining the victim's confidentiality and dignity.

INTRODUCTION

Priya's was one of the first cases I handled as a **Support Person**, representing Prerana. Like every social worker, I began this journey with a strong sense of responsibility and commitment. This case allowed me to apply my understanding of the Support Person's role in practice, while supporting Priya through the rehabilitation and judicial processes.

Looking back, I realised that while I started believing my role was to assist her in securing justice through the legal system, the journey gradually reshaped my understanding of what justice truly meant for her.

BACKGROUND

Priya was a 14-year old student in High School at the time. She belonged to a rural area of Nashik and lived with her parents, a younger brother, and an elder sister. The family lived in a small mud house located near the agricultural land where they were employed. Her days included going to school, helping her parents with the farm work, and other household chores. Her dream was to become a police officer and serve the nation.

THE VIOLENCE AND DISCLOSURE

There were two accused in the case, both of whom were known to her. One of the accused was her uncle, who was also a juvenile and lived nearby, while the other was an adult male from the same village who lived close to Priya's house. He was familiar with her daily routine and would often follow her while she was going to school and while she went out for household work.

The first incident took place when Priya was returning home from school. On the way back, a neighbour (the adult accused) stopped her from going home and sexually assaulted her in his home. He also threatened to harm her if she told anyone about what had happened, which made her fearful and prevented her from speaking about the incident at that time.

The second incident was around two weeks later when Priya's uncle, who was also a juvenile, sexually assaulted her at her home when other family members were away.



Soon, Priya began experiencing stomach pain and noticed that her menstrual period had not occurred. She went to her school teacher and shared about both assaults. Her teacher then informed her mother, following which Priya also spoke to her family about the incidents. Based on her disclosure, the Police registered a criminal case under the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, under Sections 4 and 6, along with the relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

THE CWC AND THE SUPPORT PERSON

Following the registration of the case, the local Child Welfare Committee appointed Prerana as the Support Person. The role of the support person is to ensure the safety and well-being of the victim, address their psychosocial and emotional needs, facilitate their access to legal processes and child protection services, coordinate with relevant stakeholders, and support appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration measures.

After reviewing the legal case documents, I understood that Priya and her family may require psychosocial support at different stages of the case. This included regular supportive conversations with Priya, helping her express and process her concerns, engaging with the family to understand and address their concerns, and providing guidance for her education. These interventions also helped me understand that the support required would need to be ongoing and responsive to the changing needs of the child.

INTERVENTIONS

Building On Her Interests And Aspirations

As part of the psychosocial support provided to Priya, I encouraged her to talk about her interests, the activities she enjoyed and the things that made her feel happy. I also asked her about her aspirations and what she would like to pursue in the future. During these conversations, Priya expressed her **dream of joining the police force**. These conversations provided her with an opportunity to express her interests and aspirations and helped us identify areas of interest that could be considered while supporting her educational and future planning.



During the initial stages of the legal proceedings, **Priya demonstrated remarkable courage** and maturity in navigating an unfamiliar legal system. One incident during the hearing of the accused's bail application particularly stayed with me. Before the proceedings began, Priya approached me on her own to understand what would happen in court and what the hearing meant.

Since she had a clear understanding of my role as a Support Person, she knew what information I could provide and asked thoughtful, relevant questions before making any decisions. Rather than relying entirely on others, she carefully understood the process, discussed it with her mother, and took initiative wherever she could.

She independently wrote down her “say” regarding the bail application, explained it to her mother, and ensured that her statement was submitted to the Court through the Public Prosecutor. Witnessing this moment, I was struck by her confidence and sense of agency. Despite being a child navigating a complex legal process, **she actively participated in decisions that affected her case**. Observing her resilience and determination reinforced my belief that she possessed significant inner strength despite the adversity she had experienced.

As our interactions continued, I consciously focused on building trust with Priya and her family. I tried to create a safe, non-judgmental space where they could freely express their thoughts, fears and expectations. Establishing this rapport became one of the strongest foundations of my further interventions.

The Turning Point: Family's Decision to Withdraw From The Case



Unexpectedly, a turning point came when Priya's parents decided to withdraw from the case. Initially, they chose not to discuss this decision with me because they were concerned I might feel disappointed after the efforts invested in supporting them.

As our conversations continued, I understood that their decision was influenced by fear of social stigma and pressure from relatives. They were worried about how continuing the case might affect Priya's future and how society might perceive her, especially with regard to her future marriage. They felt that withdrawing the case would protect her from further social pressure and difficulty.

Instead of reacting emotionally or attempting to persuade them otherwise, I chose to understand their perspective through empathetic conversations.



The Family's Concerns

While exploring the reasons behind their decision, I learnt that the family had been facing continuous pressure from relatives and people in the community. They were repeatedly advised to compromise and move on, as continuing the legal proceedings could affect Priya's future and how she would be perceived. Priya's mother shared a painful reality: although her daughter had experienced harm, **society continued to judge the child rather than those responsible**. The family was particularly worried about Priya's reputation, her future marriage prospects, education and emotional well-being, as well as her ability to live safely and comfortably within the community.

I also spoke with the family about why continuing the case was important and explained that the legal process was a way of addressing what had happened to Priya and seeking justice through the appropriate system. I gave them space to share their fears and listened to their perspective. However, even after these discussions, **the family continued to feel that the pressure from relatives** and concerns about Priya's future were difficult to manage. Their concerns were not limited to the court proceedings; they were also deeply worried about how the case could affect their family's reputation, Priya's future and their place within the community.

Priya's Voice

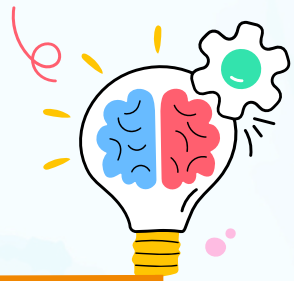
At the same time, Priya openly shared that she initially wanted the court case to continue. However, as the family discussed their concerns and the pressure they were facing, she later shared that she would accept whatever decision her family made. I gave her space to express her feelings, understand her options and think about what she wanted for her future. I reassured her that what had happened was not her fault and that she should not carry the blame or shame for the actions of others.

Later, Priya shared that she would respect whatever decision her family made. I respected her decision while continuing to ensure that her views and well-being remained central to my support. This experience helped me understand the importance of balancing advocacy for a child's rights with acceptance, non-judgement, and respect for the child's **self-determination**.





PRACTICE GUIDE



Children in Priya's position are often told, directly or indirectly, that the family's reputation depends on them. A social worker can explain this using two simple analogies, the "old rules" of an unfair game and an invisible heavy backpack. The aim is to validate her feelings first, then gently explain that "family honour" is an unfair rule, created by a system called patriarchy, that places the wrongdoing of adults, including harm by people close to the family, onto the shoulders of young girls.

1

VALIDATE AND GIVE COMFORT

Before explaining the larger idea, make sure she knows she did nothing wrong.

- Listen first: let her share her fears.
- Remove guilt: tell her clearly that the situation is not her fault.
- Praise courage: remind her that telling the truth takes a lot of bravery.

2

EXPLAIN PATRIARCHY: THE "OLD RULES" ANALOGY

Avoid heavy academic words at first. Use the idea of an old game with unfair rules.

- The big invisible game: explain that a long time ago, men made up a set of rules for how the world should run. This system is called patriarchy.
- Unfair roles: in this game, men were given the power and leadership. Women and girls were told their main job was to keep the peace and make the family look good.
- The protection trick: the rules say girls must be protected, but they actually protect the family's secrets instead of the child.

3

EXPLAIN FAMILY HONOUR: THE "HEAVY BACKPACK" ANALOGY

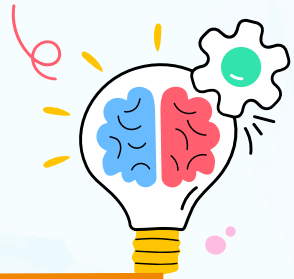
Connect the larger system to her own feeling of pressure.

- **The invisible weight:** *"Imagine your family has a giant, heavy backpack filled with rocks. They call this backpack 'Family Honour' or 'Reputation.'"*
- **The unfair hand-off:** *"Instead of the grown-ups carrying it, the old rules of patriarchy try to hand that heavy backpack to you, a young girl."*
- **Protecting the wrong thing:** *"When people ask you to drop the case to 'protect the honour,' they are asking you to carry that heavy backpack so they don't have to feel embarrassed. They are worrying about what neighbours will say, instead of worrying about your safety."*





PRACTICE GUIDE



4

REFRAME THE TRUTH

Help her see that dropping the case does not actually fix anything.

- **True honour:** explain that true honour comes from doing the right thing, being honest, and protecting children.
- **Shifting the blame:** *"The person who hurt you broke the rules, not you. The pressure you feel is just the old system trying to hide the truth to keep things looking perfect on the outside."*



SHIFTING FOCUS: EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE

As the case progressed, my intervention gradually shifted towards Priya's education, safety planning and future aspirations, which she had identified during our initial assessment. This helped me follow a more client-centred approach, where support was guided by Priya's needs, interests and priorities.

A COMPUTER SKILLS COURSE

After completing her secondary school examinations, Priya reached out and shared that she wanted to enrol in a computer skills course. She had already gathered information about the course and its fees, explaining that she wanted skills that would support her future education and employment. Recognizing her motivation, I prepared and presented her case before Prerana's Internal Sponsorship Committee for financial support.



At Prerana, this committee reviews requests for financial support, where case workers present the child's needs, strengths, and the purpose of the proposed sponsorship. The committee decides whether the sponsorship would meaningfully contribute to the child's well-being and future development. After discussing Priya's case and her commitment to learning, the committee approved sponsorship for her course fees.

Priya attended the classes regularly, completed the course, and achieved an outstanding result. More than the score itself, it was her initiative, from identifying the course on her own to making the most of the opportunity, that stood out to me.

CHOOSING HER OWN PATH



As our professional relationship continued, Priya became increasingly confident in making decisions about her education. Before moving to the next level of schooling, she discussed the available academic streams with me and thoughtfully considered her options before choosing one.

More recently, while preparing for her board examinations, she shared that she would benefit from additional tuition classes. Rather than waiting for someone else to suggest a solution, she had already identified a suitable coaching institute, enquired about the fees, and approached me to discuss financial support. Recognising her commitment, I presented her request before the Internal Sponsorship Committee, which approved sponsorship for her tuition fees. Priya is currently attending classes regularly, and the support has enabled her to prepare for her examinations without the added burden of financial constraints.

Today, Priya continues her education with confidence and remains hopeful about pursuing higher studies. She continues to call and share updates about her academic achievements and future plans.

As a Support Person, I regularly shared updates on her progress with the Child Welfare Committee through case reports and follow-ups. The CWC appreciated the support provided through the sponsorship, which helped her pursue the course she had identified. Priya also responded positively to the support, and the rapport developed over time helped her feel comfortable reaching out, sharing her concerns and discussing her plans.

REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING

Throughout this journey, I often reflected on my own role as a Support Person. There were moments when I questioned whether I had done enough for the legal case. However, with time and support from peers, I realized that meaningful case work is not measured only by legal outcomes. It is **equally reflected in a child's ability to regain confidence**, continue education, rebuild aspirations, and make informed choices about their own life.

The most significant learning from this case was understanding the true meaning of empowerment. By the end of our journey, Priya and her family had developed the confidence to assess their circumstances, weigh their options and **choose what they believed was the best course of action** for their future. Respecting that decision, even when it differed from my initial expectations, was an important part of my ethical and client-centred practice.

Looking back, this experience helped me understand that rehabilitation is not only about recovering from adversity, but also about building trust, supporting a child's aspirations and creating opportunities for her to move forward with confidence.

CONCLUSION

This case transformed my understanding of the role of a Support Person. I began the journey believing that my success would be determined by the progress of the legal case and whether there would be a conviction in the case. I completed the journey with the realization that my greatest contribution was helping a young girl reclaim confidence in herself, continue her education and exercise the freedom to make informed decisions about her own life.

For Priya, that was what justice truly meant.



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