

Worksheet 14 – Panjy’s story

Panjy’s story

Panjy was born in a rural village in Tamil Nadu, India where most people work in the local fireworks factory – both adults and children as young as 10. Due to the chemicals used in the factory, people suffer a lot of health problems. For most families, the main priority is getting food on the table. By the time Panjy is four years old, her father has passed away from being exposed to the chemicals for too long.

At the age of 10, Panjy is still in school and she loves it. She wants to become a doctor so she can help people. School is free for everyone, but many families are so poor they need to send their children out to work. Many of Panjy’s friends, and her sister, are already working 12 hours a day coating fuses at the factory, earning just 30 rupees (30p) a day.

By 2012, Panjy has been taken out of school and has been married to a boy from the next village for almost a year. She met her husband for the first time the day before they got married. Her mother borrowed money to pay the dowry and she is now paying high interest on her debt; “debt is never ending”. Panjy says that she manages the household next to her work at the factory. She says that no one in India would say that men and women are equal – “a woman who says that would be looked on badly”. She often misses schools, but focusing on work and the rides to the factory with the other women help her to forget her troubles.

Facts on child labour in India

- Around the world, millions of children do dangerous work in harmful conditions rather than being able to go to school. This puts their health, education, personal and social development at risk. Children work long hours for little or no pay and often face abuse.
- An estimated 12% of children in India, or roughly 215 million children, between the age of 5 – 17 are engaged in child labour.
- About 70% of child labourers in India work in agriculture. Other jobs include domestic work, begging, industries like mining or brick kilns; work in bars, restaurants and tourist establishments; sexual exploitation; soldiers or, like Panjy, in factories.
- Most children work because their families are poor and they need to contribute to meet their basic needs. Children are employed because they can be paid less, are more vulnerable and less likely to make demands. Children perform work that is seen to require small hands – sewing beads, working on looms, or coating matches and firework fuses.