



# Independence for Rural Women in Southern India

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## Location: Pune, India

India has one of the largest populations in the world and is considered to be a cultural gold mine. Traditional gender roles are well known for representing a strong patriarchal society where women manage the house and support their husband. There was a time where women couldn't attend school, hold corporate jobs, or even drive a car. Fast-forward to today and women can be found in various corporate positions, graduating from universities, and becoming business owners.

The city of Pune has a very fast growing economy and is becoming popular with natives as well as tourists. You can find women who are working mothers, own businesses, and are finishing college. The same can't be said for women who live in the rural area. It is common for young girls to drop out of school after their 10<sup>th</sup> year and begin preparations for getting married and having children. Many of the older women are illiterate, have never left their village, and don't believe that young girls need an education.

The young women in the villages surrounding Pune are finishing their tenth year and are expecting to be married soon after and not attend a university.

## Classroom Connections

- SW 683 Evaluation-This course helped me understand the different ways of evaluating a program and how to relay your findings back to your client. Also this course explored and discussed the ethical and unethical ways to conduct an evaluation
- SW 628 IP with Children and Youth- This course explored how to relate and explore various topics with youth who have a diverse socioeconomic, race, gender, and cultural background

## Advice

- Pushing your boundaries is one of the best things you can do for yourself
- Be open to participate in a culture that is not your own
- Bring a piece of home with you that will comfort you when times get hard
- Invest in a Sims card. You will be happy that you did.

## Assignment Information

### Agency/Community Partner

Sterlite Technologies, a telecommunications corporation founded the Jeevan Jyoti Vocational Training Institute. This facility provides rural women the opportunity to learn vocational skills such as data entry and Microsoft Office, tailoring, beauty skills, nursing, and fashion design. Majority of these graduates become business owners and are able to assist family with financial and household needs.

### Project Information

My assignment was to interview past graduates about their experience and turn their interviews into stories of impact showcasing the differences the program made in their life. I worked with a native translator and traveled to several different villages surrounding Pune to speak with graduates.

### Outcomes:

My major accomplishments included:

- A final presentation to the CEO and founder of the Jeevan Jyoti institute presenting my findings.
- Creating Seven stories of impact to be used by the Sterlite Technologies to market the effectiveness of the institute
- Conduct and transcribe key informant interviews of former graduates.
- Create an academic paper that discusses the change of women's expectations/roles in Indian society

## Social Work Skills Practiced

1. Communication Skills- Work effectively despite language and cultural barriers
2. Documentation Skills- Accurately transcribe and organize all interviews/impact stories
3. Active Listening- Engaged participants in meaningful reflection about barriers and strengths

## Lessons Learned

- Be prepared for miscommunication about assignments/ expectations
- Don't force your opinions /thoughts on someone
- Get rid of any preconceive notions about a culture/country. Let the people of a community teach you about who they are
- Go in being a blank slate for each and every client you meet

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