



SUCCESS STORY

Protecting Victims of Violence

A shelter gives women refuge from domestic violence and protects those who return home



Photo: USAID/Virginia Foley

Satya Rani Chadha and Shajahan founded Shakti Shalini after their daughters died for failing to meet demands of their in-laws.

“Rescuing victims is now the aim of my existence,” says Satya. “When I bring in a new woman or help someone escape death, I feel a fresh lease on life.”

Arranging her sari delicately around her face, a woman tells the stranger that after being repeatedly beaten by her husband, she and their two children fled to an ashram for protection.

Another tells how her in-laws seized her property and told her to return to her parents after her husband died.

These residents of Shakti Shalini, a USAID-supported shelter in New Delhi, India, are two of an increasing number of Indian women who are subjects of violence and exploitation. Few have a formal education or income, and in New Delhi, an estimated 100 women are thrown out of their homes every day.

Satya Rani Chadha and Shajahan founded Shakti Shalini in 1987 after their daughters died for failing to meet the demands of their in-laws. With this haven, the two women hope to help women who are being exploited, victimized or abused by their families — and prevent more tragedies like theirs.

“Rescuing victims is now the aim of my existence,” says co-founder Satya. “When I bring in a new woman or help someone escape death, I feel a fresh lease on life.”

Up to 35 women and their children can be housed in Shakti Shalini’s short-stay home, and although the top priority is to help residents return home, women can stay at the shelter for up to two years if needed. Aside from giving abused women a place to stay, Shakti Shalini offers them legal aid, medical assistance, rehabilitation and help initiating police investigations. Its counseling and support services protect women who return home — and the shelter welcomes them back if their return is unsuccessful. Shakti Shalini conducts public information campaigns to raise community awareness about violence against women, and since the shelter’s resources are finite, it also maintains a referral network to make it easier for women to find continuing assistance.

Empowered by her stay at Shakti Shalini, the resident whose property was seized by her in-laws started studying her legal rights. Her case is now in court.