

Sarah's Story Identity





Identity

My name is Sarah. I am 38 years old and I own a small business selling women's clothes. My shop is located near the bungalow that I own with my husband, Davinder. My situation has not always been this good. My parents live near a slum on the outskirts of the city. They always worked hard but the money was never enough.

During secondary school, I met Davinder. He worked in the cement business with my cousin. We were attracted to each other as soon as we met. He was not ashamed of my poor home and he had good manners. My parents liked him, and my mother told me not to let this opportunity pass me by because not many boys like him would want a girl like me. He proposed. I was young, but my mother's words rang in my ears. We had a large wedding ceremony and my family got many gifts.

Davinder was everything I ever dreamt of in a husband. He was kind, took me out to restaurants, and showed me off to his friends. I gave birth to three children, with two years between each. I stayed at home and cared for them well until they were all in school. After that, I had a bit more time on my hands. That is when I told Davinder about my business plan. He was very supportive. We bought a place and soon my customer base grew as more people heard of the nice clothes I sold. I dressed well and made sure I looked good to attract even more customers.

Soon, some of Davinder's friends started commenting on how beautiful I was and how much business I was getting. At first, he was pleased, but when the compliments grew, he started getting jealous.

That's when things made a turn for the worse...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 1.

Sarah's Story

Violence Strikes 1





Violence Strikes 1

Davinder's attitude toward you and your work continues to change. He tells you that there is no need to dress up and look so pretty at work because the business is going fine. You explain that it is important to look presentable and that dressing nicely helps you to feel good about yourself. When he accuses you of having a boyfriend, you think he must be kidding.

Davinder keeps popping in to visit you in the shop at odd hours, he checks your phone to find out who you have been calling, and you even find him checking your diary and personal budgets. It is aggravating, but when you ask him to stop, he says that he is the man and that he will do whatever he wants. Tension fills the house whenever he is home, and you begin to have your meals in silence.

You try to hold his hand and cuddle next to him in bed but he turns away and grunts that he is not in the mood. Sometimes he grabs your arms and pushes you away, leaving you feeling rejected and confused. You try buying nice lingerie to excite him in bed and spend fewer hours at your shop. Davinder still ignores you at night and treats you like a child during the day by dropping you at work and spying on you. You wonder what is happening to the charming man you first met.

If you decide to speak to your friends, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 1.

If you decide to seek help from your parents, go to Family and take card 1.



Sarah's Story

Friends & Neighbors 1



Friends & Neighbors 1

You go to your close friends who also happen to be some of your best customers. They can see you are unwell by all the weight you have lost. They say you don't look yourself and you know you have lost your glow. You tell them that your husband has changed; he is always so sullen, does not spend time with the children, and constantly accuses you of having a boyfriend. They are shocked because they know how faithful you are.

They hold your hand and listen to your pain. They tell you very few women can find good men like Davinder. They try to reassure you by saying that jealousy is common in men and that the phase will soon end. One even tells you that jealousy in men is a sign of true love. They tell you to take a look at their own lives. One does not work but stays at home to be with the children; another works and has to pay the rent, school fees for the children, and for food; and the other has a husband who constantly cheats—just the other day he brought home another child. Comparatively, your life doesn't seem that bad. But you cannot know what the future holds...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.



Sarah's Story

Family 1



Family 1

Your mother is weaving a basket with her friend when you return home. She is overjoyed to see you and wants to know everything about you and your business. She talks away as she prepares tea and tidies up the sitting room. After discussing the children and your father's health, she asks about Davinder and you finally break down.

You tell her how everything was going so well until recently when he became suspicious and controlling. Embarrassed, you tell her that Davinder started accusing you of sleeping with other men. You explain how he does not want to have sex and doesn't spend time with you or the children. She interrupts, "For the sake of your children, you must stay in the house. You are very blessed to have a man like Davinder. He provides for you, and he even allows you to make your own money. All men are the same, and he only worries about you because he loves you. Now for goodness sake, go back home and cook dinner. And make sure you don't do anything to make your husband angry."

You don't bother to reply because you know that your mother thinks you live a perfect life. In comparison to hers, you know you are lucky. As you sip your tea, your father returns home and you tell him a little of your troubles. He tells you that he did not raise you to be a quitter. He raised you to be strong and that you must stay that way for the sake of your children. After all, you are the first one in the family to own a car and whose children go to school in town.

Looking at your life from your parents' point of view, you return home feeling grateful, but the feeling doesn't last long...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 2.

Sarah's Story

Violence Strikes 2





Violence Strikes 2

When you get home and see your children, you know that you must be strong for them. You focus on your wifely duties—having dinner ready for Davinder and never mentioning work or wearing nice clothes in front of him. Your husband returns to his former kind self and apologizes for mistreating you. He even offers to repaint the shop. You wonder why you ever doubted him.

Unfortunately the change in Davinder is short-lived. One night, as you watch the news with him, you receive a call from a male customer. Furious, Davinder grabs the phone out of your hand and fiercely slaps your face. He doesn't return home until the next evening when he takes your phone and smashes it against the wall. He tells you that you are a good-for-nothing woman who married him for his money. He drags you to the bedroom, throwing you down on the bed. You try to resist, but he pins you down, forcing himself on you for what seems like hours. When he finally falls asleep, you go to sleep in your daughter's room and in the morning he is already gone. You try to hide the bruises but you don't know what to say to the children when they ask you where their father has gone. He returns in a few days with a bouquet of flowers and apologizes profusely. He vows to be the best father and husband ever and gives the children all kinds of treats. You are upset and frightened by his violence and don't know what to do.

If you decide to go to your neighbors, go to Friends & Neighbors and take card 2.

If you decide to put all your energy into your business, go to Work and take card 1.

If you want to give Davinder another chance, go to Carry On and take card 1.



Sarah's Story

Friends & Neighbors 2



Friends & Neighbors 2

Your neighbors have been hearing the shouting coming from your home. They eye you suspiciously when they see you. They see your bruises. When the couple next door finally stops to talk, they surprise you by asking what you have done to anger Davinder. You try to explain that he has become jealous for no reason. They cannot understand because Davinder has always been a good friend to them, offering them lifts to work at times and buying gifts for their children on their birthdays.

Your fear compels you to ask them if they would come over next time they hear you in distress as you are afraid of what might happen to you. The man chuckles and says that he cannot interfere in another man's private life. You leave feeling demoralized and even more alone.

The next day, the wife comes to the shop. She pretends to be busy looking at clothes but she quietly advises you to seek legal advice, saying that for the sake of the children you must be sure you are safe. You don't have any idea where to begin seeking legal counsel because you left school before you could understand the process. You can't imagine bringing strange lawyers into your intimate problems but you thank her for her concern. You start to think about your options and wonder if your parents may understand what you are going through and be able to help.

If you decide to seek legal advice, go to Legal Services and take card 1.

If you decide to go to your parents for support, go to Family and take card 2.

Sarah's Story

Legal Services 1





Legal Services 1

You have never visited a lawyer before. You go to the address that your neighbor's wife gave you and find a grey gate opening into a neat compound with a guard. He is kind and lets you in quickly.

Since you didn't make an appointment, you wait nervously in the reception until a man ushers you into a small office. He barely looks at you as he asks you what brings you to the office. First you tell him that you do not understand anything about the legal process and that you want to get help for your marriage. The man's phone rings and he tells you to wait. It is a long time before he returns and the wait makes you so anxious that you almost run away.

Finally the lawyer returns with information about the divorce process and gaining financial independence. You ask him to explain what it means but he tells you to read through the papers and then make an appointment, emphasizing that you cannot show up without an appointment. Looking you up and down, he says that it is not a cheap process and that they don't do charity work so payment is expected upfront. You leave the office in shame and confusion. You are determined to do what it takes to protect yourself, but for now you can only go home to what you hope will be safety...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.



Sarah's Story

Work 1



Work 1

Davinder's mood swings continue. Sometimes he is charming, and other times he is angry and aggressive. Sometimes he stays out all night. Your children begin to suspect that there are problems, and they feel scared when their father comes home drunk. The stress takes a toll on everyone. Even your business has started to decline due to the trouble at home. After taking the children to school early in the morning one day, you leave the house help to attend to the house while you sit down to brainstorm ways to improve your business. You decide that no matter what you cannot afford to have your business fail. Reading up on business and marketing trends, you discover new ways of attracting more customers and decide to completely rebrand your image. It takes energy but with Davinder gone so much, you have time to devote to your work. You keep your papers carefully hidden and locked at home and Davinder doesn't seem to suspect anything. Before long, your customer base has increased substantially, and you begin to realize excellent profits.

Since you did not go far in school, you ask a loyal customer who works as an accountant and buys fancy gifts for his wife and mistress how you can start saving. He agrees to meet with you to go over your finances, and within a week you open a bank account in your name.

Davinder has no knowledge of your booming business and secret bank account. His behavior is still unpredictable, spending many nights out as you find solace in work. You keep saving and find as much information as you can about the legal process of divorce since you are uncertain about what the future holds...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.

Sarah's Story

Family 2





Family 2

Your father and mother listen intently to you as you explain bit by bit how your husband's jealousy turned into violence and how even the children are scared of him. They try their best to comfort you and your father says that many men beat their wives as a sign of love. You insist that it is worse than what they think and confide that you are thinking about divorce. Your mother starts crying and your father slams his fist on the table and tells you that it is impossible. He says that Davinder is a wealthy man and that there is no way that they can return the bride price. He offers to call a meeting with Davinder's father to discuss the matter, saying that meeting with the in-laws is the only way to solve the problem. You consider it, but refuse, knowing Davinder will only deny everything or get even angrier at you for involving the families.

Looking around your parents' small house, you feel proud of the furniture and gifts that they have acquired since you got married, and deep inside you acknowledge that Davinder has indeed increased everyone's happiness.

Talking to your parents makes you realize that they cannot help.

If you decide to seek legal support, go to Legal Services and take card 1.

If you want to go to an NGO that supports women, go to NGO and take card 1.



Sarah's Story

NGO 1



NGO 1

When you arrive at the address of the NGO that you've heard of, you feel a mixture of hope and fear. You never thought your life would bring you to a place where you needed to seek the help of strangers, but you are hoping for the best.

No one greets you as you walk into the office, so you approach a woman who is typing quickly at what looks to be the front desk. "Hello?" you ask, somewhat confused. "Yes, what can I do for you?" the woman says without looking up from her computer. You tell her that you have been having some trouble in your marriage and would like to seek advice. She walks away from her desk and disappears down a hallway. She returns a few minutes later and tells you that everyone is busy in meetings but that you can take some brochures and make an appointment for a later date. You ask what kinds of services are available and she cuts you off, tapping her finger on the brochure, "It's all right here. Please read these and give me a call." You are discouraged by her abrupt manner and manage to thank her as you fumble with the brochures on your way out.

That was certainly not the experience you expected, so you decide to try your luck with a lawyer.

Go to Legal Services and take card 1.



Sarah's Story

Carry On 1



Carry On 1

You feel like a guest in your own home as you tiptoe around, trying your best to please Davinder and stay out of his way. You learn to read his moods as soon as he walks in the door and know when to cuddle up to him and when to keep away. You feel like you are living in constant fear, and when the beatings are bad, you sometimes wonder if you should try going to the police. But you cannot betray Davinder because somehow, you still love him. It helps to focus on your routine and on making sure the children feel safe.

Your business is slowly suffering because you can no longer spend long hours on marketing and finding the latest merchandise. You have had to hire an assistant to open and close the shop so that you can be home to cook meals and attend to your husband. Your customers complain that they never see you, and you stop doing your hair and keeping up with the latest fashions. Davinder used to accuse you of dressing up for other men, and now he often tells you that you are losing your figure. He always finds something to complain about and he has started to remind you that you come from nothing and that if he wanted, he could send you back.

The words sting, but you bear them with strength, thankful that the children never hear and that the beatings have subsided. You sometimes think about opening your own bank account to save the little money you earn from your shop. You even pick up some forms at the bank one afternoon. You are feeling stronger until...

Go to Violence Strikes and take card 3.

Sarah's Story

Violence Strikes 3





Violence Strikes 3

During the holiday break from school, you take the children to your parents' house so that they do not have to be a part of their father's constant mood swings. You secretly hope that some time alone will rekindle the romance you and Davinder once shared.

One evening, you return home late because you stayed to help a customer. You cringe when you see Davinder's car already in the garage, fearing the worst and preparing yourself for his accusations. When you enter the house, however, Davinder is surprisingly nice. He even gave the house help some time off. Cooking your favorite meal, he reminds you of the marriage vows you made and makes sweet love to you that night.

You wake up rather late the next morning. Stretching in the sunlight, you remember the previous evening and smile. The happiness dies as soon as you stand up to bathe and see the contents of your handbag strewn on the bedroom floor. Among the papers, you find the personal bank account forms, and you rush to dress. Davinder is nowhere to be found. He will not pick up your calls. Worried, you head toward your shop. Your heart drops as you pull up. The windows are smashed open; the door is tilting to the side with its splinters everywhere; and the clothes, shoes and other merchandise lie in a heap of ash. The smell of the fire still lingers in the air. You scream out loud but there is no one who comes to your aid.

If you rush back to the lawyer's office to demand legal support, go to Legal Services and take card 2.

If you think that there is nowhere left to turn but the police, go to Police and take card 1.

Sarah's Story

Police 1





Police 1

You hold back tears as you drive to the police station. You feel so ashamed but you don't know where else to turn. There are people standing everywhere. At the front desk, a large officer asks what you want and your stomach tightens. "I...I would like to report a case," you stammer. "What kind of case?" the man booms. You don't know exactly what to say, so you simply respond, "There was a fire. It's my husband," and pull back the scarf that covers the bruise by your ear. The man loudly states "domestic violence" and points you toward another crowded room.

After waiting for what feels like hours, it is finally your turn. When you reach the officer's desk, however, you are at a loss for words. There is no privacy. The police officer seems impatient, so you blurt out a quick version of your story, telling him how your husband beats you repeatedly and just burned down your shop. "Was the shop your property?" he asks, disregarding the physical abuse you told him about. "What?" You are confused. "Did the shop belong to you or your husband?" he repeats. "I, we, uh, well, I think..." you are not sure what to say. Your husband signed the lease when you rented the shop. "Madame, I am not sure what crime you are here to report. If the shop was not your property and you have no proof that your husband did this, then we cannot help you." You begin to plead with the man, "But what about my husband? What about the things he does to me?" The officer shrugs and tells you to go home to your relatives and sort out your marriage privately.

You leave the station feeling more depressed than ever. The police won't keep you safe, and now your business is ruined so you have no way to pay the legal fees for a divorce. Yet, you know you and your children have to get away from their father. You must make a decision.

If you decide you cannot afford legal aid and want to go stay with your cousin for safety, go to Family, and take card 3.

If you decide to follow up on the legal process, go to Legal Services and take card 2.

Sarah's Story

Family 3





Family 3

You feel so much safer at your cousin's place. The children move to a new school and you begin to pick up the pieces of your life again. It takes time but eventually the children adjust and even begin to make new friends and do well in class.

As time goes by, you set up a smaller women's clothing business. Your cousin's husband often travels for business so she allows you to set up a small shop in the garage. Very soon, the neighborhood gains interest in the clothes and through word of mouth you gain more clientele. Your parents receive the news that you have left home and beg you to return to Davinder, but you tell them that you and the children are happier and safer with your cousin.

Your cousin says that Davinder has been calling her and asks if you will consider talking with him. You refuse. After a few weeks you return from picking the children up from school to find Davinder waiting for you in your cousin's kitchen. Once you recover from the initial shock, you find your voice and courageously order him out of the house. He doesn't budge and your cousin coaxes you to hear him out. Davinder begs you to return home with him because he misses the children so much. You break down and cry. Your cousin tells you that it is only a true gentleman that can beg from his wife.

If you decide to return home with Davinder, go to Return Home and take card 1.

If you decide to stay at your cousin's place and focus on building up your new business, go to Work and take card 2.



Sarah's Story

Return Home 1



Return Home 1

You cannot deny the comfort you feel when you return back to the home you made with Davinder. Your children are also relieved to be home and see their parents back together. It feels good to be with him again and to be known as a wife.

You abandon the idea of your business forever, swearing to devote yourself entirely to your family and to being the best wife and mother possible. You cook lavish meals that take hours to prepare; you make a beautiful garden in the compound of your home; and you plan a surprise birthday party for Davinder that your friends rave about for weeks.

For awhile it seems like your troubles are over and your perfect marriage has returned. But you should have known better. Davinder slowly shifts back into the brooding, jealous man that he was and begins to stay away from home for days, ignoring or beating you when he comes back around.

His moods rage on and off. You never know if he will come to demand sex, go through your phone, or call you cruel names, but you decide this is a small price to pay for being married, for being respected by those around you, and for maintaining your family's name. This is the life you have chosen so you will make the most of it for the sake of your children.

THE END

This is the end of this version of Sarah's story. Take a few minutes to sit quietly to reflect on Sarah's experience. When you are ready, ask the facilitator for another woman's story.



Sarah's Story

Work 2



Work 2

Your cousin is rather shocked by your decision to remain behind with her. She tells you that you are being unreasonable and making a huge mistake letting Davinder go. You wonder the same thing yourself, and you cannot help but miss your husband. But when you look at your children and remember the things Davinder did to you, you know you have made the right choice.

From time to time, you think about going to see a counselor at the NGO that helps abused women, but you feel uncomfortable sharing your feelings with a stranger and can't see what good it will do. No one else has ever been able to help you.

You gain confidence as your business grows, but you know it will not be easy to take care of your children on your own. Your fear that Davinder could come and harm you or take away the children at any time, which makes you determined to get a legal divorce as soon as you earn enough money.

The money you save from your shop slowly accumulates in the bank as you watch your children grow. You work hard, waiting for the day when you can file for divorce and be free of Davinder once and for all.

THE END

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Sarah's Story

Legal Services 2





Legal Services 2

You feel horrible beginning the difficult process of divorce and are intimidated by the arrogant lawyer. You think of your parents and children with guilt but know that divorce is the only answer. Legal assistance is expensive, and it takes a long time to make any progress.

The most difficult step is filing a civil law suit against Davinder. On the same day that he receives the notice, you and the children move out of the house. You arrange it so that he comes home that night to find you gone. You pray that he never finds you.

The money you have saved up is only enough to pay for a small house and your children's school fees. There is nothing left to start up a new business. You don't know how you will continue to pay your legal fees to finish the divorce process. Your parents have no money, and they would not help you anyway because they do not approve of your decision. You cannot turn to your friends because they are also Davinder's friends and you fear they will reveal your hiding place. Eventually, you cannot afford to continue working with your lawyer and you stop the legal proceedings.

You sit at home in despair, wondering how you will look after your children by yourself. You know it is only a matter of time before Davinder finds you. You look for jobs as you watch your savings dwindle away, but there is very little for a woman like you to do.

THE END

This is the end of this version of Sarah's story. Take a few minutes to sit quietly to reflect on Sarah's experience. When you are ready, ask the facilitator for another woman's story.