



# CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE OF INDIAN SLUM DWELLERS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

**\*Dr.Prashanthi E**

Research Scholar

**\*\*Kadari Swaroop Paul Kumar**

Research Scholar

Department of Sociology and Social Work,  
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar - 522510,  
Guntur (Dist), Andhra Pradesh, India.

## Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing social inequalities. People on the move and those living in urban slums and informal settlements are among the most affected groups in the globally. Given the current living conditions of migrants, WHO guidelines on how to prevent COVID-19 (such as hand washing, physical distancing and working from home) are difficult to almost impossible to implement in areas where migrants live in informal settlement or the slums. The case of India to highlight the challenges faced by migrants and slum dwellers in the COVID-19 response is being represented in this paper, and also this paper provides human rights-based recommendations for action. And also the immediate actions to protect these vulnerable populations.

The study uses a mixed methods approach, combining in-depth fieldwork, interviews, and secondary data analysis to capture the nuanced experiences of slum residents. Key findings reveal the profound impact the pandemic has had on their lives, highlighting the problems housing shortages, overcrowding and inadequate sanitation have exacerbated. Access to health services and economic livelihoods have been severely disrupted, forcing slum residents to adopt coping strategies to survive. Additionally, the research delves into the psychological consequences of the pandemic, shedding light on how uncertainty, fear and social isolation have affected mental health in these communities. Despite these formidable challenges, the article also highlights the remarkable resilience of slum residents, exemplified by local initiatives, community solidarity, and effective response mechanisms.

This article not only highlights the issues but also proposes policy recommendations to strengthen the resilience of India's slum communities in future crises. By addressing issues of housing, health care and livelihoods and recognizing the importance of community support systems, governments and NGOs can prepare and respond well and address the unique needs of these vulnerable populations as they face future pandemics.

**Keywords:** COVID 19, Slum Dwellers, WHO, Pandemic, Lockdown, Discrimination, Socio Economic Problems, livelihood.

## Introduction:

The year 2020 will forever be remembered for Corona virus 2019 (COVID-19) and its impacts on the world. Different state governments have adopted different strategies to respond to the pandemic, such as locking down and closing their national borders. We have even seen world leaders deny the severity of the pandemic and label

it as “fake news” or “media hoax”. These stories can have serious impacts on our society and especially on the poor and slum dwellers. The global response to COVID-19 for people living in slum, migrants, refugees and other extremely vulnerable populations has been slow and inadequate. Their conditions were so pathetic during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has poses unprecedented challenges for the world's entire population, with vulnerable communities, such as slums. Residents of India, are facing special and acute difficulties. This research paper delves into the multifaceted issues facing India's slum dwellers during the COVID-19 crisis, highlighting the socioeconomic, health, and psychological dimensions of the struggle.

Following global trends and considering the increasing number of reported COVID-19 cases globally and in India, the government of India has announced a sudden and complete shutdown of the country on 25th May. March 2020. The lockdown is gradually being eased in periods across Indian states as infection rates continue to rise. In 2020, India has seen an exponential increase in COVID-19 infections. The country now has the third most reported cases in the world.

### **COVID 19 effects and consequences:**

Reported infection and mortality rates are said to be only the tip of the iceberg due to limited testing, follow-up, and uncertainties surrounding recorded causes of death. In a country where more than 80% of the population works in the informal sector, the lockdown amounts to a significant halt to economic activity. The International Labour Organization ILO states that “In low- and middle-income countries, the most affected sectors have high proportions of workers in informal employment and those with limited access to health services and social protection.”

A survey conducted in his two major slums in Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow and Kanpur, found that the lockdowns had a severe impact on economic activity. 79% of households report that at least one of the family members has lost income due to economic shutdowns, and a further 56% report that their income has decreased compared to pre-crisis. Many residents of the slum communities are rooted in severe poverty. Pre-pandemic polls show that almost all of them were born and raised in the city they currently live in. They work as housekeepers, rickshaw drivers, plumbers, electricians, mobile phone repairmen, vegetable vendors, and more. More than 80% of the slum respondents were surveyed, where they have lived for more than three generations, have little opportunity for advancement. More than half have the same occupation as their parents. In addition, population vulnerability is exacerbated by environmental problems such as overpopulation and inadequate access to water and sanitation. Residents struggle to access public assistance and basic infrastructure. Despite enormous difficulties, the survey found that 40% of slum dwellers did not have a ration card and only 34% had drinking water pre-pandemic. Just over a third of her had completed primary school, and only 6% had a job with a written contract and legal benefits. This instability was before the pandemic reached the shores of India.

### **Problems of slum dwellers:**

The slums (initially) escaped the worst fears of infection. A silver lining came with the adverse health effects of the first big wave of the pandemic. Early on, experts predicted a dire situation in the developing world, with high mortality due to poor health systems and demographic risk factors. Cases of severe infections requiring hospitalization were similarly rare. The results are consistent with official reports from India of lower rates of severe first-wave infections compared to other countries, despite the apparent spread of the virus. Several possible explanations for disease prevalence fail to explain these differences between and within cities. There are no significant differences in population age or weather between cities, although some speculate that differences in population age and climate account for differences in disease incidence. Also, these Covid-19 clusters and the use of shared facilities such as toilets and water pumps, the number of households in the slums, the proximity or mutual proximity to the city center, the demographics of the residents, etc. No significant associations with predictors were found. Pandemic shutdowns have devastated vulnerable communities.

But the good news for the first wave of health doesn't extend to economic conditions. Respondents in both cities said the economic blockades had severe and long-lasting shocks to their lives. The shock to the livelihood was sudden. In his first month of lockdown due to Covid-19, leading sources estimate that about half of household heads in Bangalore and more than 80% of that in Patna have lost their main source of income. The shock lasted too long. By November, a quarter of pre-pandemic income in Bangalore and a third in Patna had not recovered. Respondents reported working fewer days and lower daily wage rates than before the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified and exacerbated a number of pre-existing problems in slums around the world. Slum dwellers, who often live in densely populated and deprived areas, are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. Here are some of the key issues facing slum dwellers during the COVID-19 crisis:

1. **Overcrowded:** Slums are often characterized by density high population and cramped living conditions. This overcrowding makes social distancing almost impossible, increasing the risk of disease transmission in the community.
2. **Inadequate housing and sanitation:** Many slum residents do not have access to adequate housing and sanitation. The absence of clean water, toilets and hand washing facilities makes it difficult to maintain good hygiene practices, which are vital to stopping the spread of COVID-19.
3. **Limited access to health care:** Access to health services is often limited in slums. Medical facilities may be inadequate, and the cost of healthcare can be a barrier for low-income residents. This limitation can result in delayed or insufficient care for COVID-19 cases.
4. **Economic Vulnerability:** Slum dwellers often work in the informal sector, which is highly vulnerable to economic shocks. Lockdowns and restrictions put in place during the pandemic led to the loss of livelihoods for many, making it difficult for them to meet their basic needs and access healthcare.
5. **Food insecurity:** Pandemic-related supply chain disruptions and economic constraints have led to increased food insecurity in slums . Many people have difficulty accessing nutritious meals for themselves and their families.
6. **Mental health challenges:** The economic and social impact of the pandemic, coupled with fear of infection, has taken a toll on the mental health of slum residents. Anxiety, depression and other mental health problems have become more common.
7. **Limited access to education:** School closures and the shift to online learning during the pandemic have posed a significant challenge for children in rural areas and in slums, where access to technology and favourable learning environments is limited.
8. **Lack of information:** Limited access to accurate information and awareness campaigns can lead to misconceptions and misinformation about COVID-19, hindering efforts to stop spread.
9. **Discrimination and Stigma:** Slum dwellers sometimes face discrimination and stigma due to the perception that they are more likely to carry the virus , leaving them marginalized.
10. **Vulnerability to other health problems:** Focus on COVID-19 sometimes diverts attention and resources from other health problems common in slums, such as tuberculosis, HIV and maternal and child health problems.

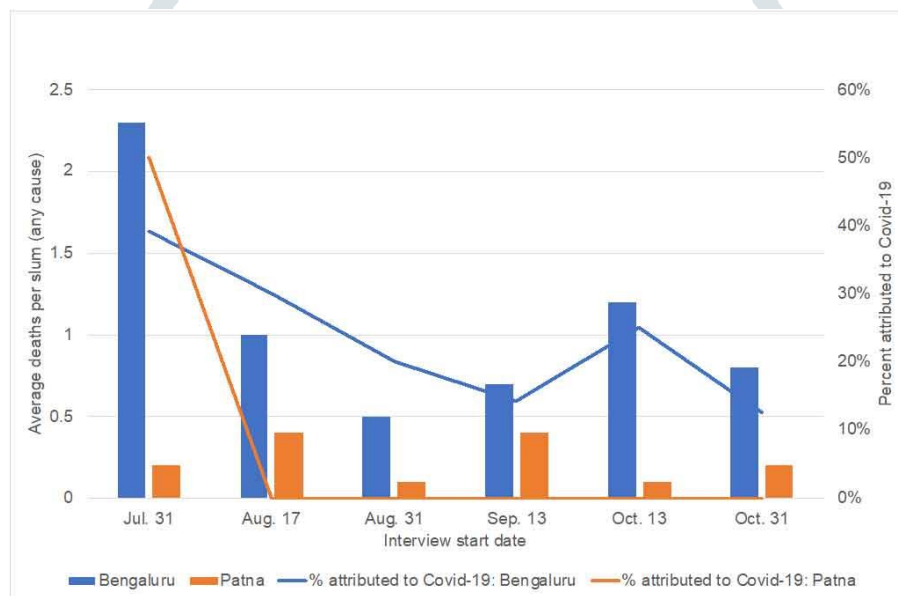
Addressing these problems in slums during and after the COVID-19 pandemic requires a comprehensive and targeted approach, including improving housing conditions, improving access health care and sanitation services, implementing social safety nets and promoting community intervention activities. Governments, NGOs and international agencies play an important role in providing support and resources to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable slum communities. With the conversion of public hospitals into COVID-19 treatment units, only expensive private hospitals are available to meet residents' non-COVID-19 medical needs. Some of the suspected Covid-19 cases requiring testing have resulted in high bills equivalent to two months' wages for cases requiring quarantine. This has resulted in significant costs for individuals as they have been forced to

abandon transportation arrangements and employment. To cope up the situations, residents cut back on food, sold valuables, and borrowed money. In areas where residents had lower pre-pandemic savings, families were more restrictive on food items than in areas with higher pre-pandemic savings.

A new research-led study highlights the disproportionate impact of Covid on girls with a focus on urban slums. It had difficulty accessing health and nutrition services during the pandemic, with 67% not taking online classes and 56% having no time to indulge in outdoor recreation.

World of India's Girls Wings 2022 report was conducted in four states of Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar and Telangana. Approximately 1,092 mothers and 1,092 girls aged 10 to 18 were interviewed. Focusing on access to health, education, play and recreational opportunities for adolescent girls in Delhi, the report said, "The majority of adolescent girls living in urban slums are in adolescence during the pandemic. They lack basic health and education services compared to others."

The pandemic is also increasing health and food insecurity as shops are closed and supplies are not available. As the impact of Covid-19 continues to affect girls' lives, there is a need to ensure better health, nutrition, and education and protection services for them, provide them with better resources and include them with better investments.



Deaths reported by key informants (total and percent attributed to Covid-19), by city (average per slum) Source: Covid-19: Health and economic impacts in Indian slums. ideasforindia.in

## Some statistics of slum dwellers during COVID 19

### Delhi

- Four in five households (79%) suffered meals insufficiency.
- Two in three mothers (63%) stated their daughters confronted problems in having access to sanitary napkins.
- Closure of schools disrupted 320 million youngsters.

### Maharashtra

- Two in three mothers (68%) stated Covid impacted their daughter`s gaining knowledge and school education.
- Only 1 in 2 adolescent women (54%) attended on line lessons.

### Telangana

- Two in five adolescent women (40%) stated they did have healthy food.
- Three in four mothers (73%) stated the pandemic adversely impacted their daughter`s gaining knowledge and school education.

**Policy recommendations include:** With the loss of their main source of income and the lack of regular and reliable support, households gave up their assets, rushed to savings and borrowed money. Months have passed since the pandemic, and this debt is now maturing, but household incomes have yet to recover. NGOs, political groups, and official government aid in the form of food and other necessities have helped the needy population. However, the provision of these necessities has proven to be indiscriminate and temporary. Regular and reliable support helps households get back on their feet faster. Reducing the worst effects of informality over time is critical to reducing risk and stabilizing lives. Regardless of their work or residence status, people need to connect with facility support. Working conditions must be progressively made safer by providing job protection, assistance for the elderly and health care. Likewise, even if individual titles are not immediately awarded, the process of notifying slums needs to be accelerated so that the threatened demolition ends. These policies help anchor a stronger and more stable lower middle class rather than leaving people in a precarious position prone to chronic poverty all the time. Promoting education and training to promote mobility. Interventions in education, skills and entrepreneurship are required, as pursued on a smaller scale by organizations promoting social mobility. Helping the talented young people from disadvantaged backgrounds get high-paying jobs in the formal sector. To reduce volatility, many stocks need to be lifted above the uncertainty zone. Need of affordable and reliable health care. Downward migration stories almost always involve families ruined by declining health and high medical bills. Policies that address these three resilience-enhancing interventions should be prioritized.

## Conclusions and policy recommendations:

One of the groups most vulnerable to COVID-19 is the urban poor, who live in overcrowded areas with very limited access to public (health) infrastructure. The COVID-19 crisis has made the situation significantly worse. Slum dwellers lost their livelihoods, lost their income and the majority failed to comply with lockdown measures. The poorest were hit hardest, but those who knew better about how to prevent COVID-19 were better able to protect themselves.

Although the pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, the fragility of slums predated Covid-19. Political intervention must come quickly and sustainably. In the short term, slum residents who have spent their meagre savings, liquidated their meagre assets and taken out loans need immediate and regular help to avoid falling into poverty, hunger deepens as debts come due. In the long term, preventing similar crises in the future requires the same institutional support that we know will help people avoid risk. These include workplace protection, health insurance and support for the elderly. In addition to these forms of social assistance, investments are needed to help people help themselves through education, vocational training and entrepreneurship. Disseminating accurate information about how to prevent COVID-19 is key to vaccine adherence. Misconceptions about how to prevent COVID-19 can create a false sense of security and undermine immunization readiness. Physicians and health care professionals play a key role in disseminating accurate information about potential vaccines. Also, future COVID-19 vaccines should not only be sold at cost by the pharmaceutical companies developing them, but should be subsidized or given to the public free of charge. There is room for public intervention to distribute subsidized or free vaccines if the population and the ability to pay are exceeded.

## References:

1. Dhillon, A., & Roy, S. (2020, April 23). How has COVID-19 crisis affected the urban poor? Findings from a phone survey - I. Retrieved from Ideas for India: <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/how-has-covid-19-crisisaffected-the-urban-poor-findings-from-a-phone-survey.html>

2. Afridi, F., Dhillon, A., & Roy, S. (2020, May 11). How has COVID-19 crisis affected urban poor, Findings from a phone survey - II. Retrieved from Ideas for India: <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/how-has-covid-19-crisisaffected-urban-poor-findings-from-a-phone-survey-ii.html>
3. Awasthi, P. (2020, April 8). UP seals off hotspots in 15 districts, including Lucknow, <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/04/08/up-seals-off-hotspots-in-15-districtsincluding-lucknow-noida-to-contain-spread.html>
4. Banerjee, A., Faye, M., Krueger, A., Neihaus, P., & Suri, T. (2020). Effects of a Universal Basic Income during the Pandemic.
5. Reserve Bank of India. (2019). State-wise Poverty Rate. Delhi: Delhi: National Sample Survey Organisation, NITI Aayog.
6. Richardson <https://www.microsoft.com/enus/research/publication/predicting-clicks-estimating-the-click-through-rate-for-newads/>
7. Ministry of Home Affairs India. (2020, July 29). Guidelines for Phased Re-opening [https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/Unlock3\\_29072020.pdf](https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/Unlock3_29072020.pdf)
8. Ministry of Home Affairs India. (2020, August 29). Guidelines for Phased Re-opening [https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/MHAOrder\\_Unlock4\\_29082020.pdf](https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/MHAOrder_Unlock4_29082020.pdf)
9. Corburn, J., Vlahov, D., Mberu, B., Riley, L., Caiaffa, W. T., Rashid, S. F., . . . Ayad, H. (2020). Slum Health: Arresting COVID-19 and Improving Well-Being in Urban Informal Settlements. *Journal of Urban Health*, 97, 348-357.
10. Deshpande, A., & Ramachandran, R. (2020, July). Is COVID-19 "The Great Leveler"? The Critical Role of Social Identity in Lockdown-induced Job Losses. *Ashoke University Discussion Paper Series in Economics*, 34.
11. Dupas, P., Black, S., Chassang, S., Cohen, J., Duflo, E., De Giorgi, G., & Einav, L. (2014). Short-Run Subsidies and Long-Run Adoption of New Health Products: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *Econometrica*, 82(1), 197-228.

