

# Covid-19 Pulse Check Ground Report 3

June- July 2021

Location: 48 Slum Communities of West Delhi (Dwarka, Uttam Nagar, Vikas Nagar)

In the global Sustainable Development Goals, the world committed to ending all forms of child labour by 2025. The last two decades have seen 94 million fewer children in child labour. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat. The pandemic is likely to reverse progress and make the global target to end child labour harder to achieve. Protsahan India Foundation, Protsahan India Foundation is an organisation working to empower girl children from difficult backgrounds of poverty, violence and abuse to access quality education, healthcare and gender justice through direct action on ground in communities and through systemic change via advocacy and research. It empowers children and stakeholders to create a future full of possibilities where children and adolescent girls, both survivors and those at risk of abuse, find an environment conducive to their safety, healing and growth.

Protsahan team has compiled its learnings from June-July 2021 as the third quick pulse check report from the ground.



1. Despite having high positivity rate in Delhi, communities in urban slums in Delhi are skeptical and afraid about Covid-19 testing and vaccinations, and don't like swabs being taken from their nose and throat. Given existing challenges like poverty and malnourishment, the virus is not worth additional attention, they tell us.
2. When everyday Protsahan India Foundation teams visit these 50+ slums to assist them with dry rations high in protein content or provide linkages with government schemes and benefits especially for pregnant women, children in 0-6 years with aanganwadis or for children who've lost primary caregiver(s) to Covid, we often meet groups of women out in the scorching sun - they have no masks on and maintain no physical distancing. **"Humein corona se pehle, bhukmari maar jayegi,"** they say. ("Before covid-19, it is hunger that will kill us.")



3. The virus has resulted in loss of income and the economic crisis causing families' reduced capacity to care for children in the long-term. It has also caused in some instances loss of parental care due to death, illness or separation, thereby placing children at heightened risk for violence, neglect or exploitation.
4. **"During the covid crisis, identifying children at risk has inherently become more challenging given that many adults who would typically recognize signs of abuse, such as teachers, childcare workers, coaches, extended family and community members and child and family welfare workers, are no longer in regular contact with children,"**: Sonal Kapoor, Founder Director, Protsahan India Foundation.



5. It is feared that since the numbers of covid deaths are being underreported, the number of covid orphans may be much higher than what it is estimated as per official figures in Delhi and across the country. Yet the covid orphan issue is only half truth, the larger chunk of the crisis involved children being pushed out of learning systems into labor/ transactional sex forever.
6. For homeless children in street, access to support services is further disrupted. Measures such as the closure of courts and the suspension of trials and proceedings, could result in the continued detention of children who might otherwise be released or placed in non-custodial alternatives.
7. As per Protsahan India Foundation's child protection workers, **child labour & incest has emerged as two of the biggest child rights violations (along with children being orphaned and child hunger as close second)** during and after the second covid wave. In just a 6-km radius from Uttam Nagar metro station to Hastal gaon, one can easily spot over 120+ children involved in non-hazardous and hazardous child labour work. As formal and informal credit options become highly restricted/unavailable, households are turning to more desperate ways to access credit, such as bonded labour of vulnerable children.



8. The risk of child marriages has increased through an interplay of various pathways, including economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in services. A few cases of child marriage have come to light where parents have told children, "Chalo, gaon ghoom ke aate hain," and then get their 11-14 year old daughters married as child brides to severely drug-abused grooms or debt-ridden men. **"Ghar par ek muh kam hoga ab khana khilaane ko."** The unemployment crisis and economic uncertainty stemming from the pandemic is bringing more families to use child marriage as a coping mechanism. School closures with the resulting interruption to girls' education have only hastened the arrangements for child marriages.
9. We have spotted a **strange trend in children who are losing one primary caregivers**. In more than 3 cases, where the children lost their mothers to covid, the father has run away/ abandoned the kids altogether and in cases where the fathers have succumbed to covid, the mothers are resorting to transactional sex/ rag picking work because their usual domestic helper work is not happening regularly to give them a nominal income. Protsahan is supporting families to cover their needs and care for their children through cash transfers and support for food and nutrition (Social protection measures).
10. **A large chunk of children from poorer backgrounds in west Delhi, who were first generation learners (over 30%) may never return to school again** as children who were generally in higher secondary classes are now being pushed into labor to supplement family income. Marginalized children pay the heaviest price as inequalities in learning widen. Over 76% children do not have access to the internet for remote learning. And for those who rely on school-based nutrition programmes/ mid-day meals, **school closures mean being cut off from the food** they need to survive. Girls are moving back to using grass, rags and straws instead of sanitary napkins. **They are reporting that parents are not giving them money to buy underwear or seek medical help for allergies and fevers.**
11. **Begging has come out to be the primary occupation in child labour post the second covid wave.** About 24 cases of such children (all girls between 7-15) are being supported by Protsahan, through family rations, education scholarships, school enrollments etc. to save the family of this opportunity costs and instead send them to school to learn. As one of our child protection officer reports from the ground, **"Many parents in our neighbourhood in Dwarka and Vikas Nagar have taken advantage of the school closures during lockdowns to send children to set up vending crates to sell fruits and vegetables in the scorching 46 degrees Delhi sun.**
12. **Children who were anyway undernourished have further lost weight** in the last 1 year owing to nutrition being severely cut down during Covid. Their loss of immunity puts them at a higher risk of carrying/ contracting the virus and infecting more people in vicinity especially in the impending third wave of covid-19.
13. Pregnant women who haven't eaten well after death of husbands who were primary bread earners, and were nursing their new borns, report, their bodies have stopped producing the

desirable quantities of milk for their babies. They are also not being taken in by hospitals for otherwise regular immunization schedules, disrupting them completely.



14. Most 16-18 year old boys in the 50+ slum clusters where our teams work have been forced to never return to school learning and supplement towards the family income.
15. A **huge gap of skilling of covid widows** (mothers of children who lost their primary bread earners: fathers to covid) is being seen on the ground. No skills to be employed. Hence again, child labour becomes an easier option to provide for food in the family that now survives.
16. Though several state governments and the centre have announced relief measures and benefits for children losing one or both primary caregivers, the genuine cases will also find impossible to access these benefits because most people who succumbed to Covid like symptoms, never got their RTPCR testing done (especially in slum clusters or impoverished brackets)
17. Older children are finding extremely difficult to get adopted or matched to adoptive families. Prospective adoptive parents desire a child between 0-2 years mostly as we're told from the ground.
18. Few direct anecdotes from the field visits **where Protsahan is directly supporting the family/ extended family with critical support and government linkages to benefits and**



**schemes wherever applicable.** In critical cases Childline 1098/ local CWCs have been informed & cases are being followed up and supported. (Alias names used to protect identity.) :

- **"Sold" into marriage with a drug addict much older man, for Rs 1,00,000 as a 14-year-old adolescent girl Meena.** (मीना (बदला हुआ नाम ) 14 वर्ष, Protsahan में पढ़ने वाली लड़की जो अपने मम्मी के साथ डोमेस्टिक हेल्पर का काम करती थी / उसके पापा कूड़ा बीनने का काम करते हैं / लॉकडाउन में बिहार के जिला सहरसा में मीना को ले जाकर उसका बाल विवाह करवा दिया गया / दहेज में मम्मी-पापा ने 1 लाख रुपए दिए और शादी होने के बाद पता चला की लड़का हर प्रकार का नशा करता है / मीना की मानसिक स्थिति को Protsahn के सेंटर में लेकर ठीक करने की कोशिश कर रहे हैं / मम्मी - पापा की लगातार काउन्सिलिंग हो रही है / और मीना को लर्निंग शीट और प्रोटीन किट की सुविधा प्रोत्साहन दे रहा है / )
- "Father of a 5-year-old boy Saksham, succumbed to Covid second wave, mother who was a heart patient heard of the husband's death, died of a heart attack."
- "Father succumbed to Covid-19 in second wave, because of economic stressors, a 17-year old boy had to drop out of school because he was Rs. 500 short of school fees. He now works at a factory to provide for his mother and sisters."
- **"Little children as old as 4-years old are involved in sewing toys with 8-10 hours of back breaking work for Rs. 3 a day. If they don't work, who will feed them?"**



- **Priyanka** is a 12-year-old girl residing in Uttam Nagar, Delhi with her grandparents. Her father passed away 4 years back, and she lost her mother due to COVID recently. Her grandmother, aged 60-65 years, works as a domestic help to make ends meet for the family. With no support for ration and linkage to the Public Distribution System (PDS), this family is facing difficulties with getting their regular rations and providing the required sanitation facilities and necessities to Priyanka. With interventions from Protsahan, the family is now getting their regular rations with high protein elements and access to sanitary supplies for the girl. Further, the child is given access to digital devices, textbooks and stationery to continue her education along with help for scholarships and educational aids at Protsahan child protection center by connecting her to a local child protection center run by the organization. With the support from Protsahan, this girl is also made to meet peers from her same age group who support each other and become friends. **With menstrual hygiene needs in mind, Protsahan is also offering underwear and sanitary napkins for her along with menstrual**

**education and hygiene practices.** Finally, with Aadhar card being a proof of social identity, Protsahan's efforts have gone into getting Priyanka an Aadhar card to make the best out of Government Schemes and Scholarships available for her. Team is regularly following up on the case.

- **Ayush** is a 12-year-old boy residing in Dwarka with his old grandmother. He lost his father in his early childhood to blood cancer. With the loss of his mother due to COVID-19, he was left under the care of his grandmother. The grandmother says, **"Who will look after these kids after I die? These children are the legacy of my son and daughter-in-law. Lot of people are coming asking for adoption. How can I give them away? They are my heirs. This small house we live in is theirs. It's their property. They should have it."** Although he was attending classes from a local government school, the financial distress during the pandemic pushed him to work in a tea stall. With no learning opportunities, he was pushed to severe child labour that violated his child rights. Ayush was found by Protsahan frontline workers during a regular Anganwadi visit and Protsahan is now supporting Ayush and his family with constant ration support. Protsahan also ensures that the child is under the right care and given the right mental and physical support for achieving developmental milestones and a happy childhood. Team is regularly following up on the case.



- **Anu and Ankush:** Ankush is a 5-year-old boy who lives with his infant sister Anu in Dwarka with their grandparents. After losing their father 2 years ago to an accident, these children were abandoned by their mother who remarried. This incident left them under the care of their old and ill grandparents. During Covid-19 The boy has already been admitted to a local anganwadi by the grandmother with Protsahan's frontline workers' support. With Protsahan's intervention, the family is getting their constant ration supplies and educational needs supplied. This helps the family to benefit from healthy, protein-rich meals along with continuing their education and learning activities. Team is regularly following up on the case.

- **Sameer and Manushi:** Sameer is a young teenager (aging 13-14 years old) hailing from Dwarka. He lives with his sister, Manushi, aged 5 years, and their mother. Losing their father to COVID has made the family lose the only breadwinner of the family and has pushed the family in financial distress. Earlier, before the pandemic, the boy was admitted to the local government school and was studying in grade 7. With the pandemic and loss of the primary breadwinner; the boy is pushed to child labour which violates his child rights. Working as a handyman in a local electric shop, he supports the family while his mother is jobless. The admission for his sister in the local anganwadi was difficult but Protsahan supported that. With Protsahan's intervention, the family is getting their constant ration supplies and educational needs supplied. This helps the family to benefit from healthy, protein-rich meals for their children along with continuing their education and learning activities. Team is trying to provide education scholarships for these 2 children until 12th.
- **Praveena and Pranita** are sisters aged 11 years and 7 years respectively living with their old grandparents in Dwarka. Their father is mentally ill, and these children were abandoned by their mother at a young age. Although this family has a ration card, it does not include names of these children, which makes it difficult to get supplies and ration for them. With Protsahan's intervention, the family is getting their constant ration supplies and educational needs supplied. Additionally, considering that the girls are young, Protsahan offers protein-rich ration containing soya beans, Rajma, and curd along with a happiness kit comprising masks, clean underwear and stationery. The girls are shortly being enrolled at the local STEM digital lab for adolescent girls in the slums where they'll also get access to online learning from next month.
- **Geeta Kumari** is a 25-year-old woman belonging to the begging community (locals call it the 'kanjar samudaya'). This community belongs to Rajasthan. With no sanitation and hygienic practices, the community members, especially girls, lack most basic necessities for hygiene like clean underwear. Hailing from this community, our team spoke to a woman who is 7 months pregnant and is facing several distresses during her journey to motherhood. Firstly, she has no immunization schedules or any immunizations done till date. **"I am 7-months pregnant, haven't got any immunizations. Every time I go to the local PHC/ doctor/ aaganwadi they all ask me to come back later."** With all hospitals dealing with COVID cases, there is no one to help her with her immunization schedules and other core needs for pregnancy. Secondly, the cost of delivering a child using a midwife is also high in the impoverished slums and is not affordable by the family. We are told that with the delivery rates as high as Rs. 10,000 for a boy and Rs. 5,000 for a girl, it has become difficult to manage. She fears for her unborn. With her old husband working in a cattle farm, Geeta and her 4-year-old firstborn stay at this unhygienic cattle area. With no rent to pay, they have been pushed to this state, and the family doesn't have any utensils or caregivers to take care of Geeta or her child. With Protsahan's intervention, she has been offered constant rations and other needs for a pregnant mother. Our child protection officer, Rehana helped Geeta with admission in



an Anganwadi, through which she is getting her necessary care and regular medicines as required by her. Additionally, the 4-year-old toddler is also being helped by Protsahan with her early childhood educational needs and clean underwear. Finally, Protsahan is looking ahead and working with midwives to help other people in the community with cheap and harmless deliveries.

- **Mansi and Rohan:** Mansi is a 7-year-old girl living with her brother Rohan in Dwarka. Their family originally hailed from Bihar and are part of the Beldari workers. Their father is a daily wage worker and earns around Rs. 5000 pm. Covid-19 took away his meagre income too. This pushed the family into financial distress without any means of external support. Additionally, families with his background usually have difficulty paying rents, forcing them to change their location of residence regularly. This makes it difficult for them to get support from the local anganwadis and government schemes as well, as Payal, our child protection community worker handling the case, says. On the brighter side, this family had a ration card and aadhar cards as documentation. This made it easier for Protsahan to link these children with the government ICDS services i.e. Anganwadis, where they getting protein and carbohydrates in the health kits consisting of poha, gram dal, pulses and peanuts. With ration procured, this family is now benefited with basic food for their children.

- **Sangam Kumari** is the eldest pre-teenager (aging 11-13 years) residing in Dwarka with her 5 siblings. This family is involved in the dairy small business with her father selling milk in the local community. Originally hailing from Bihar, this family has a rented bike that is useful to sell the milk from the cattle. Residing in a cattle field, Preeti's mother is mentally unstable and is unable to comprehend what people try to say to her. With Protsahan's intervention, Preeti and her siblings get admitted into a government school on 16th April 2021. The 3 daughters of this family have also enrolled for bridge support and life skills sessions at our local child protection center. The family is also provided constant support with rations and health kits. These rations are loaded with proteins and carbohydrates that would help in the development of children and help them get a basic diet.



- **Hina** is a 26-year-old pregnant woman residing in Dwarka. With the support from Protsahan, she has been getting constant rations, immunization every trimester and also got the covid-19 vaccination from the local mohalla clinic and support from anganwadi interventions. These rations are loaded with proteins and carbohydrates that would help

to keep her safe and healthy during the development period of her child in the prenatal stage. Protsahan is also helping lactating mothers from becoming malnourished and weak.

- **Riha** is a 11-year old girl who came to Delhi along with her family. Owing to the pandemic and financial distresses in the family, Riha was being forced into child marriage. With Protsahan's interventions, Riha was pulled out of being a child bride and her family was assured of support with respect to nutrition and education. Such cases are prevalent in the society and increased with the pandemic because of financial distress in the families or lack of care-givers for the girls.
- During one of our community field visits we came to know of a young 20-year-old **pregnant woman**, over 9-months pregnant (occupation begging, husband polishes boots in streets to make ends meet) who hadn't eaten well owing to the covid-19 economic stressors financially. **She gave birth to a baby last week (July 10th 2021) who died the very next day because it was born extremely malnourished and couldn't survive.** They also have a 2-3 year old infant. After this case came to Protsahan, we're constantly supporting them with a 26-kg ration kit complete with nutrition (protein & carbohydrate rich) that will help the family tide over these crisis times. Team is trying to link the woman and the 3 year old boy with a local aanganwadi kendra for sustained services.
- "Before the lockdown, papa used to work as a white wash contractor in people's homes. That work has completely stopped. Now we all get together and sell vegetables on the cart. **I also go to the mandi and sell vegetables, sometimes I work at local shops to clean their utensils.** That's how our home expenses run these days. I have 3 younger siblings. Mother is a domestic helper, she was also asked to leave all the homes where she worked during the lockdowns/ covid spread. Financial situation at my home is not good at all. We all work to be able to survive." Nagina, 14 years. We're supporting them with rations, learning sheets and protein kits for the children and their family.
- Priyanka, is a 14-year-old student in class 8th, who takes child protection support services from Protsahan. During the second covid wave lockdown, she was taken by her



family to their native village in Bihar and married as a child bride. The entire family works as ragpickers including Priyanka and her sisters. (Preeti, our on ground child protection officer mentions, “लॉकडाउन में स्लम कम्युनिटी में बहुत से केस ऐसे आ रहे हैं जिसमें ये देखा जा रहा है जो बच्चिया स्कूल नहीं जा रही हैं / उनको गाँवो ले जा कर उनका बाल विवाह करा दिया जाता है / ताकि एक आदमी का खाना बच सके / कोविद-19 के कारण हालात और भी गंभीर हो गए हैं / लोगो की मानसिक स्थिति ठीक नहीं है / इसलिए सारा गुस्सा वो बच्चो और अपनी पत्नी पर निकाल रहे हैं / हमारे डाटा के अनुसार घरेलु हिस्सा के केश भी बढ़ गए हैं / घर में खाना न होने की वजह से बच्चे बाल-मजदूरी का शिकार हो रहे हैं /

- “My father died due to Covid-19. My mother’s spinal cord is injured and she has just got her operation done. I now have to work as a domestic helper to provide for my family. At my place of work, no-one talks to me with respect. They swear at me and call me filthy names. We have not been able to pay the rent of the house as well. The landlord also comes and says dirty things to me and my mother every other evening and goes. **For a mere Rs. 500 I had to leave my 9th class at school.”** Gopal, 16-year-old. Protsahan is providing for constant ration support for this child and both his sisters are now enrolled at Protsahan’s child protection center where they get access to sanitary supplies, education support and constant counseling.
- In the 48 slums where Protsahan India Foundation works, almost 200+ children are involved in ragpicking, That’s how their families and them get food to eat. One of the little girls that we recently got enrolled for child protection services at our centers in community, **Gulshan, 10-year-old girl picks scraps and rags from 12 in the night to 6 am in the morning.** She says, **“I work in the night because that’s when I find good scrap for sale after shopkeepers close their shops. By the morning the area gets cleaned. Also in the afternoon I have to go to Protsahan to study., how can I miss my classes?”** Protsahan is supporting Gulshan and many hundreds of girls like her with 26-kg ration kits per family per month as they tide of this extra loss in incomes, support with school enrollments and medical emergencies support along with access to key government schemes.
- Payal,13 and Pushpa,8 (name changed to protect identity) are two sisters who come to Protsahan to study. They both **make clothes for dolls for 30 paise a piece.** For 100 pieces they earn Rs. 30. Most days they’re able to earn Rs. 3-4 per day after 8-hours of back breaking work. “ये दोनों बच्चिया गुड़िया के कपड़े बनाती हैं जिसके 100 पीस पर उनको 30 रुपए मिलते हैं / और पुरे दिन वो यही काम करते हैं / मम्मी की मृत्यु हो गई है और पापा मानसिक रूप से ठीक नहीं हैं / इसीलिए वो बच्चो के साथ नहीं रहते हैं / ये बच्चे कपड़े सिलकर अपना गुजारा चलाते हैं / दादी और चाचा के साथ रहते हैं /” reports our child protection officer from the ground. Punita says, “If we go to the Protsahan center to study so on those days we are not able to work and earn for food. My sister and I really want to study but eating food is also important haina didi?” Protsahan is supporting the girls with ration kits and learning kits and 3-hours of study support everyday. We are trying to enroll them under our scholarship program from this month so their family doesn’t make them work all day. Dadi is supportive and has also



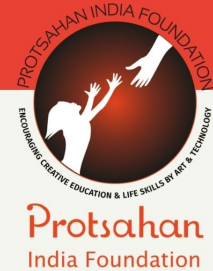
picked extra domestic helper jobs to support her granddaughters. Their mother had remarried and abandoned them, the father is mentally unwell and cannot take care of the children.

- Alka (name changed to protect identity) is 12 years old. Her mother Reeta (30-years-old) works as a domestic helper. Reeta has a 1.5 year old son and a 6-year-old daughter as well who Alka takes care of.(sibling care also falls under child labor) Alka had stopped going to school because after her father's death, mother started working as domestic helper and the care of her two younger siblings came on her shoulders. Alka doesn't play, doesn't study, doesn't enjoy any rights a child of her age should enjoy. Protsahan is following up on the case, trying to make sure she gets enrolled in the closest government school along with a scholarship from Protsahan. Currently we're supporting the family with rations and counseling support for the children. **"Pressure for sibling care is a form of child labour that deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Children Alka's age, belong in schools not performing caregiving labor. Sibling care acts as a major barrier to education, affecting both attendance and performance in school even for children who are enrolled. When looking at solving child protection issues, the problem has to be looked at and solved intersectionally and holistically, else it will never be sustainable."** Sonal Kapoor, Founder CEO, Protsahan India Foundation. Alka also told us one day when she came to the center, **"Didi, my mother has gone to work and I am hungry. I feel like having some rice. There is no rice at home and mother will be home by 6-7PM. I also feel like going to school but mother says, if I don't take care of them, mother will have to skip work and all of us will have to sleep hungry."**



## OUR INTERVENTIONS

@NGOPRO TSAHAN



### Essential Child Protection Services

#### Dry Ration Support

9368 children supported

1

#### Trauma Counseling

388+ CWC counselors supported

2

#### Linkages with Govt. Integrated Child Protection Schemes

690 child abuse cases being tracked & monitored

3

#### Children Losing Caregiver(s)

Holistic Support Services - Education Scholarships, Nutrition & Enrollment at our Child Protection Centers for free tuition support and digital devices for quality learning.

4

Support Protsahan do more.

Linkages with Aaganwadis and Aadhar card, Ration card services by Govt.