

# Covid-19 Pulse Check Ground Report 4

August– September 2021

Location: 60+ Slum Communities of West Delhi (Dwarka, Uttam Nagar, Vikas Nagar)

Post COVID -19 Lockdown: Who are we leaving behind?

COVID-19, a “once-in-a-century pandemic”, has severely impacted the intersectional invisible sections of our communities. The migrant community, the urban homeless, residents of informal settlements, and daily wage workers are among these sections. The pandemic has intersected with their pre-existing disadvantages, bringing to the fore inequalities, discrimination, and anxieties. The lockdown had already disproportionately hurt marginalized communities due to loss of livelihood and lack of food, shelter, health, and other basic needs but the issues didn’t end with the lifting of the lockdown. Protsahan team has compiled its learnings from August- September 2021 as the fourth quick pulse check report from the ground.



## 1. Losing Source of Livelihood

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*A quick note by Protsahan India Foundation documenting on ground updates on child protection emergency in context of Covid-19 with a focus on condition in urban slums in Delhi-NCR.*

Millions of people lost their only source of income as the COVID-19 lockdown closed down many industries and street operations across India. The lockdown also introduced new travel, transport, and physical distancing regulations. These new rules did not only prevent people from working but also left them struggling to get 2 meals a day. 80% of the slum community members are daily wage labourers or engaged in begging, rag picking or women working as domestic helpers. Almost 65% of them lost their jobs during lockdown, but despite the lifting of the lockdown, they could not find any source of livelihood. Most of the small factories wherein they worked have shutdown, women who worked as domestic helpers aren't getting enough homes to work in as people are scared to employ house helps due to COVID and even daily wage labourers are struggling to find work again. The debts have also increased during the lockdown as they had taken loans to survive during the lockdown. Most of them are unable to pay the rent of the house since several months and have been asked to vacate the spaces.

1. Sanya's\* father worked as a daily wage labourer and mother as a domestic helper but due to the lockdown both of them lost their jobs. Now post the lockdown, the father is still struggling to get a job and the mother has got work at 1 house but before she worked in 4 houses. Now due to the fear of COVID, people are not employing anybody. Her 14-year-old daughter had to start stitching work to support her family. She says, "there is no food in the house for days. It's really bad. I have left studies to support my mother."

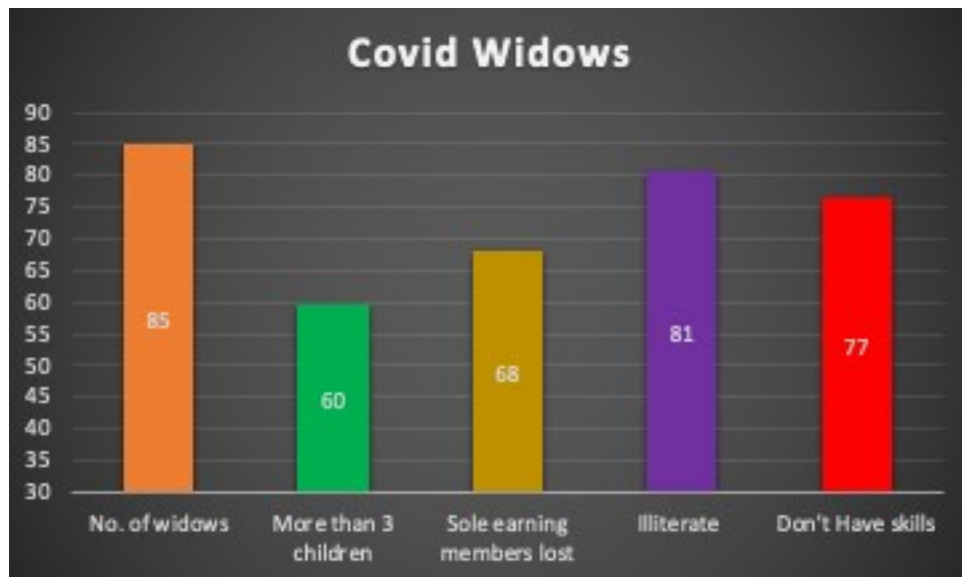


14-year-old girl sewing doll clothes in the darkest corner of Dwarka slum community to sustain her family

2. Anoop\* worked in a factory before the lockdown but the factory got shut down post the lockdown as it was incurring losses due to the pandemic. Like him, there were 117 people who worked with him who lost their jobs. Anoop gets daily wage work only for 8-10 days in a month. It is difficult for him to sustain his family of 6 members with no stable income.
3. Shiv\* lives with his 4 children at the heart of the slums of Uttam Nagar. He worked as a waiter at weddings before the pandemic wherein he earned INR 12000-14000. There was no work during the lockdown and when the lockdown opened after the second wave, less people are coming for the weddings, so the requirement of waiters has also decreased. He has started working at a shoe shop at 4000 which is not enough to pay the rent of the house and sustain his family of 6 members. He says, "The pandemic has thrown us in deep debt. I don't know what to do, where to go. I can't see my children in this situation".

## 2. Survival Difficulty for 'COVID Widows'

The deadly second wave has widowed thousands of women, who are struggling to return to some semblance of a normal life. The women who lost their husbands to COVID-19 are called 'COVID widows' but what about several women who lost their husbands during COVID. Their situation is equally miserable. These widows find themselves saddled with additional financial burdens such as hospital bills, sustaining their children, providing for their education while they grieve the loss of their partner. \*Shanti had started working 10 days after her husband's death while she was pregnant with a 7-month baby as she had no one to feed her or her 3 children.



Sample data of Covid Widows from the slum communities of West Delhi

In the 60+ slum communities, we are in direct contact with 85 widows who have lost their husbands to/during COVID. 68% of these widows have lost the sole earning member of the family leaving them behind with no support system for their children or themselves. They have no savings or means to even feed themselves.

Most of them are barely literate so they don't know how to run the house without their husbands and don't have any skills to sustain their families. A huge gap of skilling of covid widows is being seen on the ground. No skills to be employed.

The government has come out with schemes to support the "COVID widows" but women from marginalized communities are not able to access the schemes as they either don't have enough information or documents. To qualify for government support, widows must show a marriage certificate and a death certificate stating that the cause of death was COVID-19. These requirements create another roadblock, Preeti, Chief Center Coordinator, Protsahan says, "Even when deaths are registered, they might not be registered as COVID deaths due to factors such as poor record-keeping or they were not able to



make it to the hospital and died in the house without any testing. So disadvantaged families are not able to access the financial assistance.

Shramila\* is 25 years old. She lives on rent in the west Delhi slum community with her 8 years old daughter. Her husband died due to COVID in 2020. Her husband worked as a daily wage labourer. After her husband's death, there is no earning member in the family. Her mental and financial condition is not good. She had registered for the CM Relief scheme for COVID effected families. But she has not heard from anyone yet. She has been running from one office to another in hope for some assistance from the government. She says, "mountain of sorrows has fallen on us after my husband's death. I am not literate, so I don't know anything.



How do I feed my daughter and give her education? Who is going to give job to a poor, uneducated woman like me? He has left me all alone in the world."

Roopa's\* husband committed suicide due to debt in April. Roopa has 4 children who are studying in government schools, but they haven't been able to even buy books or register. They have no money to pay the rent also. She isn't working as one of the children is disabled, she can't leave him alone. She has to take care of her aged in-laws who are also not keeping well. She says, "my husband wanted my daughters to be police officers, I want to fulfil his dreams but there is too much debt to pay, and the condition of the house is such that we are struggling for 2 meals a day. My children don't deserve this but what do I do?"



Roopa with her 2 daughters in Dwarka slum community

Harshita\* works as a domestic helper. She lives with her 4 children in a rented room. Her husband has died of COVID. She has studied till graduation but after the death of her husband, she has to work as a domestic helper to run the house.

With the loss of only earning member of the family and the mothers being illiterate without any work or less work, the children have to take the burden of the siblings and the household. They are losing their childhood and growing up too soon to take care of their families.

\*Anita's husband died in October 2020 due to paralysis. She too had a spinal operation due to which she is not in a working condition. She has 2 daughters and a son. The son is 17 years old; he left his 10th class admission as he didn't have 500rs to pay for his admission. Now he has left school and is working at a mobile shop to support his sisters' education and mother's health treatment. They couldn't pay the house rent for few months as there was no one earning in the family. Now the landlord has asked them to pay 25000 rent of last few months and vacant the house. The 17-year-old boy says, "I didn't get time to even grieve my father's death. Everything is fallen on me now. We can't even afford Rs 500 right now, how do I pay 25000 plus the education of my sisters. "



Sangeeta cut her hair because her name was removed from school

With low level of education or no education in most of the cases, and the patriarchal set up doesn't allow the widows any respite. The nature of women's issues in the society and the issue of COVID widows are worrisome. The fight that a widow has to take on in the patriarchal society during the pandemic is even more frightening. Meanwhile, the physical and mental health of these women are being neglected, their children's problems, their financial, social, emotional issues, and sexual abuse are making a huge impact on their lives. Their situation has become graver and darker due to COVID.

### 3. Children 'the Silent Victims'

The COVID-19 pandemic is harming health, social and material well-being of children worldwide, especially children who come from vulnerable communities. School closures, social distancing and confinement increase the risk of poor nutrition among children, their exposure to domestic violence, increase their anxiety and stress, and reduce access to vital family and care services. Widespread digitalization mitigates the education loss caused by school-closures, but the poorest children don't have conducive home-learning environments with internet connection. Furthermore, increased unsupervised on-line internet use has magnified issues around sexual exploitation and cyber-bullying.

According to UNICEF's report, more than 1 billion children are at risk of falling behind due to school closures aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19. To continue the learning, many remote programs have been implemented yet children from marginalized communities don't have access to internet,

personal computers, TVs or even radio at home, amplifying the effects of existing learning inequalities. Students lacking access to the technologies needed for home-based learning have limited means to continue their education. Children who have access to the digital devices, have reached a stage of fatigue of online studies with no practical or physical aspect to learning. As a result, many face the risk of never returning to school, undoing years of progress made in education. Many children have forgotten to even write their names. They were already at the margins and now due to the pandemic, they are falling off the margins.

Education of female children has been affected, as their parents see, the financial and opportunity costs of doing so. Children are not able to take admission in colleges or schools due to financial issues. Some of the girls can't dream about college now due to the financial situation of the house they have started working to support their families.

18-year-old Pratibha\* has passed from class 12th and she has started working at a call center. She says, *"I wanted to go to college, but my house situation will not allow me to pursue studies further. I have to take responsibility of the house and take care of my siblings' education also."* Like Pratibha, there are hundreds of other girls whose dream of going to college or school seems bleak due to financial condition.

*"My father sells bangles in the market, due to the pandemic his business got really slow. He had not paid my private school fees for several months as we had no money, so they cut my name from school. Now I have been enrolled in the government school as my father can no longer afford the fees of private school"* says 15-year-old Simran, girl champion from Protsahan.



18-year-old girl burdened with household chores leaving her no time for studies

Many children like Simran have cut their names from private schools as they could not afford the fees anymore. Sangeeta's\* is a 15 year old girl who had cut her hair and clothes with scissor as she could not bear the trauma of not going to school. Her name was dropped from the school because she failed in her 9th exam. Sangeeta says that she didn't have money to buy a smartphone to attend online classes nor does her parents have one. She lives in a rented room with 3 siblings and parents. She has to do all the household work and take care of her siblings which left her no time to study. She says, *"I want to study further, I don't want to stay at home"*.