

## Impact of COVID-19 during and After On J.J. Clusters of Delhi



Ar.Arafat Aziz<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Alqa Aziz<sup>2</sup>, Ar. Tabish Neha<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the residents of J.J. clusters, informal settlements in Delhi, India. The article highlights the challenges faced by the residents in terms of the economic crisis which were directly proportional to the architectural planning of these areas also discusses the stigma related to COVID-19 which was surrounded by it which further exacerbated the situation, causing discrimination against slum residents and creating fear and anxiety.

**KEYWORDS:** Economic Crisis, J.J.Clusters, Stigma

### INTRODUCTION

The recent Covid 19 pandemic was arguably the biggest horror faced by the collective human race around the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people around the world, and India is no exception. India's pandemic burden on lives across the world is among the highest which is dominated by the lower income groups. Most affected people were those living in the J.J. clusters due to their crowded living conditions across the nation which had the least number of utilities and facilities, to begin with. It spread rapidly in the early days of the pandemic, there was little awareness of the virus or how to prevent it, and many people in these communities continued to live and work as usual. This allowed the virus to spread rapidly, leading to high infection rates and deaths. Taking Delhi as an example, the areas that have been hit particularly hard are the J.J. clusters in Delhi, which are home to many of the city's poorest residents. With around 1.87 million cases, most come from these clusters only. Many other aspects contributed to the propagation of the virus which created a domino effect affecting the lives of people at the very grassroots level. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the economic condition of people worldwide, and the J.J. clusters in Delhi had been no exception. These clusters are home to some of the city's poorest residents, and many of them have been hit hard by the pandemic, and even in 2023 they are still suffering. Most of the people were daily wagers from their local shops and other works which were shut down during the pandemic and people even who were suspected were associated with social stigma and were left without any way of earnings and depriving them of resources making them more dependent on the government.

### METHODOLOGY

Systematic qualitative research was performed along with observational research in the J.J. clusters of Delhi in the areas of Okhla Industrial Area and Jamia Nagar. Random sampling was performed in these areas for the extraction of the data along with discussions with associated professionals. The whole analysis was performed during and post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

### Architectural-Economic Scenario of J.J. Clusters

J.J. clusters comprise a large number of low-income residents who live in small dwelling units out of which many are shanties made of scrap materials. The architectural planning of the JJ Cluster is largely informal, with the residents themselves constructing their own dwellings as witnessed in many colonies like Sanjay Nagar, Majdoor Camp, etc. The shanties are built using a variety of materials, including corrugated metal sheets, plastic sheets, and bamboo poles. Over a period of time, Basic necessities have been introduced by the locals with the help of the government and many DU's many have been converted into permanent structures but the overall state of living conditions has not improved much. The government has earlier and also is promising and providing many schemes for the upliftment of the people but the overall planning and living conditions still remain the same. Closely grouped DU's and the local marketplaces with narrow streets along with the absence of basic facilities like sanitary and water are among the characteristics which directly provide the overview of the economic conditions of these colonies. It also exposed the densely populated pockets due to which social distancing measures were difficult to implement due to the lack of space.

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The lack of formal planning in the JJ Cluster has resulted in a number of challenges for the residents during the pandemic from which many are still being hit. For example, the shanties are often built very close together, which makes it difficult to access basic services such as water, sanitation, and even proper sunlight. Due to the lockdown during COVID-19, many were left suffering from these basic amenities. In addition, the lack of proper infrastructure like in the cases of Batla House and Shaheen Bagh means that these areas were prone to flooding during the monsoon season from which they suffered as basic aid from the government and different organizations were delayed in many such areas.

### **Economic Hardship**

The pandemic situation in J.J. clusters in Delhi has had a profound impact on the people who live there. Many slum residents in Delhi work in the informal sector, which has been hit hard by the pandemic. The pandemic has severely impacted the informal economy, which is a significant source of employment for people in J.J. clusters. Many families have lost loved ones to the virus, and many others have been left struggling to make ends meet as the pandemic has forced businesses to shut down. Children have been forced to drop out of school, and many families are now facing increased poverty and food insecurity. The loss of income and livelihoods led to economic hardship, making it difficult for residents to afford basic necessities like food and medicine.

People in these communities work as daily wage laborers or in the informal sector, such as street vendors, domestic workers, or construction workers. When the pandemic hit, these jobs were among the first to disappear as businesses closed down and people stayed at home. This has left many families struggling to make ends meet, with little or no income.

Another factor that has contributed to the economic hardship of J.J. cluster residents is the lack of government support. The government announced several relief measures, such as cash transfers, free food, and other forms of support, but many people in J.J. clusters did not receive these benefits. This is because they are often not registered with the government and therefore not eligible for these programs. The lack of government support has left many families without any means of support during the pandemic.

The closure of schools and educational institutions has also had a significant impact on the economic condition of J.J. cluster residents. Many parents in these communities were not in conditions to afford to provide their children with online education or home-schooling, which means that their children had been out of school since the start of the pandemic. This has meant that many children were missing out on education, which could have long-term implications for their future economic prospects.

In addition to these challenges, the pandemic has also led to increased food insecurity in J.J. clusters. Many families in these communities were already struggling to put food on the table before the pandemic, and the economic downturn has made the situation worse. The closure of markets and restrictions on movement has made it difficult for people to access food, leading to increased hunger and malnutrition.

### **Stigma**

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected people physically but has also had a significant impact on their mental and emotional well-being. One of the most distressing effects of the pandemic has been the stigma associated with the virus. In Delhi's J.J. clusters, stigma related to COVID-19 has been a significant issue, causing harm to people's lives and livelihoods.

The stigma associated with COVID-19 led to discrimination against slum residents. This made it difficult for them to access resources or services, further exacerbating their difficulties during the pandemic. The stigma related to COVID-19 in Delhi's J.J. clusters was primarily due to the fear and misinformation about the virus. From 675 registered Delhi's J.J. clusters, People who had tested positive for COVID-19 or were suspected of having the virus were often stigmatized and discriminated against. This stigma leads to social isolation, loss of income, and limited access to healthcare and other essential services. Furthermore, families of COVID-19-positive individuals were often ostracized and discriminated against, even though they may not be infected. People avoided any kind of direct trade with such people who were even rumored to be in contact with infected/symptomatic persons. Most suffered were local hawkers with many still suffering from the debt they owed mostly in unsecured loans from other people due to which their economic condition has deteriorated and is proving to be difficult for them to get back even to the scratch condition. Others included local vendors from small-scale grocery stores to textile stores, from local barbers to street food hawkers. These people lacked tremendously and some are not even got a bit stable even after the pandemic situation is over technically.

The stigma associated with COVID-19 has also led to fear and anxiety among people in J.J. clusters. They were afraid to report any symptoms or seek medical help because they feared being stigmatized. This reluctance to seek medical assistance leads to the spread of the virus and further exacerbates the situation. The situation was an interdependent situation but locals were left with no choice which created a common negligence towards the COVID-19 virus.

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### CONCLUSION

The slums in Delhi are densely populated, and social distancing measures were difficult to implement due to the lack of space which forced the government to enable lockdowns, and basic necessities were delayed. This led to a higher risk of transmission of the virus among the residents. Slums in Delhi often lack basic infrastructure like proper housing, ventilation, and adequate sunlight. These conditions lead to poor health outcomes which made residents more vulnerable to the virus. Overall, the poor living conditions in JJ clusters in Delhi had made the pandemic even more challenging for residents. To address these challenges, the government and other stakeholders started working without any coordination with each other but later started to align but now they must work to improve access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and healthcare so as to avoid or control any such situation quickly. Additionally, efforts were made to maintain social distancing and practice proper hygiene but residents were unable to do so because of the closely grouped planning of these societies.

Many slums in Delhi do not have access to proper sanitation facilities such as toilets, clean water, and hand washing stations. This made it difficult for residents to maintain basic hygiene, which was crucial in preventing the spread of the virus. This has been compounded by the fact that many people in these communities work in jobs that require close contact with others, such as street vendors or domestic workers, making it easy for the virus to spread.

Many slum residents do not have access to healthcare facilities or resources, one of the key challenges in preventing the spread of the virus in J.J clusters. This made it difficult for them to receive adequate medical attention or testing for COVID-19. Many residents cannot afford to visit a doctor or hospital, and the few facilities that are available is often overcrowded and understaffed. This meant that many people who have contracted the virus have been unable to receive proper medical care, leading to higher mortality rates.

The government and civil society organizations had tried to address the stigma related to COVID-19 in Delhi's J.J. clusters. They had launched awareness campaigns to educate people about the virus and its impact. The campaigns aimed to dispel myths and misconceptions about the virus and promote a more understanding and supportive attitude toward people infected with the virus. The government had also increased the availability of COVID-19 testing and treatment facilities in J.J. clusters to encourage people to get tested and seek treatment. The pandemic situation in J.J clusters in Delhi has highlighted the inequalities that exist in Indian society which directly impacted the local economy of these clusters from which people are still recovering.

Overall, while the architectural planning of the JJ Cluster is largely informal, the Delhi government is taking steps to improve the living conditions of the residents through the provision of permanent housing and other basic services which could help in uplifting and upgrading their living conditions. It is important to provide them with financial assistance, some scheme or more relaxations in relation to their living and working environment to help them in their present condition.

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