



COVID SITUATION GROUND REPORT - Second Wave, May 2021 Pulse Check_Report2.

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



As the second wave of covid spreads like wildfire, an entire generation of children are in jeopardy of losing their safe spaces, their parent(s) and their childhood. The ripples of COVID go far and wide, wreaking havoc in children's lives: starting with loss of livelihood from parents unable to work, malnutrition from lack of basic necessities, ultimately being pushed into child labour and sexual exploitation out of economic distress. Rising cases of child sexual abuse, child labour and transactional sex only heighten the need for intervention: both short-term as well as long-term, societal-based reforms in tackling issues such as vaccine hesitancy and COVID orphans without caregivers. While Protsahan has been actively intervening and following up on cases of COVID widows and orphans, the sheer volume of cases is more than our resources can handle. As many as 27 cases of children losing the primary breadwinner in their family reach us in one day. These children and their family need essentials, as well as assurance of long-term needs such as education and psychosocial support. Following is a quick pulse check documentation of ground updates as of May 2021.

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COVID has destroyed everything for us. After losing my husband, there is no one left to feed the family. The landlord comes every day to ask for rent. How do I pay his rent when I can't even provide two meals to my children? I feel helpless. I don't want to push my children into begging.” Vaanyi is a 19-year-old widow who lost her husband recently to COVID. She lives with her 3 children and sister-in law at Uttam Nagar slum community. She worked as a domestic helper but due to COVID, she has lost her job and is left alone to feed the entire family.

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We are unable to pay the rent of the house for the last two months with only for a few days.

We have no option but to go to our village, at least we would have something to eat there.

“ Neeta is a 17-year-old girl champion from Protsahan. Her father worked as a peon in an office but due to the death of his employer because of COVID, he lost his job and has been unemployed for the last 2 months. With 5 people to feed in the family and no income, it is getting difficult for them to survive. Every time there is talk about half the family moving to village, Neeta gets scared, because in the absence of her mother around, the father makes Neeta feel very unsafe. Last year, he had tried to rape her, when she was alone with him.

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Everyone is frustrated due to loss of family income and it affects the child the most. My father is always angry and stressed and it all comes on me and my siblings. He has also burnt all my textbooks when I was studying at home. There is no peace in the house”. Tithi, a 16-year-old girl.

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It breaks my heart to see the ground situation. Every day we are getting cases of familial sexual abuse with children (incest), pregnant women not getting a meal/day, infants on breast milk, losing their mothers. The situation is more horrifying than last year. If we don't do anything right now, we will see more losses and grief. “ Payal ji, Child Protection Officer, Protsahan India Foundation.

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We're looking at a generation of children in extreme distress and facing severe trauma who will grow up to be broken adults. Every day, the stories from the ground are becoming more heart-breaking even for civil society at large that has always worked in these spaces. Need based interventions won't just cut it, rights-based thinking & policy needs to be key on issues like adoption, tackling vaccination hesitancy in remote pockets and covid orphans. These issues are not unrelated but larger pieces of the huge system crumbling domino effect. This is a child protection emergency.” Sonal Kapoor, Founder Director, Protsahan India Foundation

Other key insights from the ground:

- COVID has caused thousands of children without a parent and in some cases both the parents. We have identified around **41 cases of tiny kids** who've lost their father to covid. Their mothers are homemakers and due to COVID, they have lost their jobs as well. Bannesh is a 14-year-old boy who has lost his father to COVID. He lives with his mother and two sisters. His mother is a homemaker. **With his father's death, they are left with a hospital bill of 1.5lakh, and no earning member in the family. His mother, a covid widow, says, "I can no longer afford to send my son back to school, ever."**
- **A POCSO case of a 6-month old girl raped by her father has come to light when her mother reached us to help her get justice.** Team Protsahan is constantly on the frontlines liaising with investigating officers, local police and supporting the child's mother with

counseling and rations.

- **The trauma doesn't stop with losing parent(s).** It becomes never-ending as children are forced into manual labour and sexual exploitation in a desperate bid to overcome poverty. Girls are selling their bodies or being sexually exploited at homes through reported cases of 'transactional sex' and boys are working at tea stalls or small shops to feed their families. Kobha Devi, 25-year-old woman from Dwarka slum lost her husband 10 days ago. She is a homemaker with 2 little daughters and a boy of 13 years old. The young boy has started working at a repair shop to feed his young sisters and mother. Similarly, **4 young girls from Protsahan Center in Vikas Puri who come from the rag picking community are begging to fill their stomachs and their families.**

- The number of covid widows has also increased in the last few months. In our slum communities of Uttam Nagar itself, we have found **29 cases of young widows** in the last couple of weeks. A young woman of 21 years old has recently lost her husband to COVID and now she is on an oxygen cylinder as she has also been infected with COVID. **With a ten-month-old child, and no one in the family to earn, the situation is unimaginable for the family.**



- With the lockdown and loss of work, migrant families with no ration card are left struggling for food. Sheraaza, Mazraana and Narjeena are 3 sisters with 2 brothers. Their mother died when they were young, and their father fled with another woman. They are now living with their aunt and uncle and their children. The entire family is engaged in rag picking and due to the lockdown, they aren't able to sell the rags. **With a family of 12 members, they are surviving on one meal a day.** 30 children who come to study at the local Protsahan child protection center who are into rag picking are going through a similar situation with more cases increasing every day. To think, that they'd have the luxury of PPE kits or gloves as they pick rags, would be a fantasy.

- School going children who have lost their caregivers/ or have both parents sick due to Covid have started vending vegetables in local areas.



- Pregnant women are also falling through the cracks as our health system collapses. When they need mental, and physical support, the constraints imposed by the pandemic have made it worse, especially for vulnerable families. There is trauma of deaths and infections in their families, which adds to their anxieties about their yet-to-be-born children or, in case of new mothers, about their infants. With many losing their daily warnings or the breadwinner of the family due to COVID, pregnant women are not getting enough food to feed themselves. **They are surviving on just one meal a day and if the situation continues then the**

mothers and the babies are unlikely to survive. We identified 7 pregnant women just in first week of May 2021 itself, who have no ration or anyone to take care of them.

- Even though the COVID curfew is decentralized, and lockdown more cautiously managed this time, there is little support offered to working classes and migrants whose livelihood are at sea once again. **Due to unemployment, food security, a wipe- out of their savings and mounting debt, hundreds of informal and daily- wage workers are forced to go back to their villages. 17 families from our communities have left for their village in the last one week itself with no hope of survival in the city. In all of this, the children are put to work (labor/ trafficking/ transactional sex/ begging/ rag picking) and lose hopes to ever going back to a school ever again.**

Other critical support being given by Protsahan in the ongoing crisis:

Protsahan's focus points at this critical stage of the pandemic have been centred around identifying and intervening in cases of children who have lost one or both parents to COVID-19, and are at the brink of child labour and sexual exploitation out of poverty-driven circumstances. Our efforts have encompassed primary intervention and access to justice, provision of essentials (education scholarships and nutrition high in protein/ ration basics on a needs basis), and long-term grief and trauma counselling for children rescued from these situations.

Our frontline intervention and support revolves around the following aspects:

1. Frontline intervention, rehabilitation and support to children who have lost one or both parents to COVID-19 or are facing severe economic distress, with a focus on intervention in cases of abuse and gender-based violence to prevent further exploitation - <https://www.ketto.org/fundraiser/protahanforindia>
2. Providing essential goods like nutrition for pregnant mothers, baby food for toddlers, and protein kits for children who have lost their primary breadwinner to COVID-19.
3. Providing children and pregnant women with direct linkage services with state services (anganwadis, asha workers, child welfare committees and one stop centers) as required.
4. Providing frontline care to young pregnant covid widows who have lost their husbands to COVID in the form of counselling, rehabilitation and continuous support for nutrition.
5. Training child protection workers and frontline workers of other NGOs in active partnership with state governments, and directly working with shelter homes' across the country on the long term trauma informed care of children in their care and psychological first aid.
6. Supporting victims with speedy justice and trial in POCSO cases (Protection of Children From Sexual Offences Act, 2012) wherever necessary.
7. Helping families in cremations of children who have died, where the family is not able to pay for the cremation expenses.



For more: <https://protahan.co.in/covid-19-response/>