

A REPORT ON HOW DHARAVI'S WOMEN ARE COPING

In this sixth weekly report we look at how women in Dharavi come with the pandemic and the lockdown. This information has been collated from 18 phone interviews with women from Dharavi.

GETTING SUFFICIENT FOOD AND SUPPLIES IS STILL THE BIGGEST FEAR AMONG WOMEN

Still working in-and-from home

The lockdown has stalled several work activities in Dharavi which directly affect women. In regular times, women are often working around the clock on the domestic front to support the family. Younger women had the opportunity to work from home. Many women ran small household businesses. Light snacks, miscellaneous household items, to daily tiffin services in many parts of Dharavi were a regular feature of everyday life. Everything has now come to a standstill because of the lockdown. These activities supported the family's economy, and sometimes they were even the sole source of income. Many families are now left with little or nothing.

Kavita Koli, a resident of Koliwada, Dharavi, ran a successful home-cooked food delivery business. After many migrant workers left Dharavi in the last month and factories were shut, businesses like hers have taken a big blow.



Kavita preparing lunch

Some of the respondents from Dharavi mentioned that the circumstances would have been better if they had been able to move back to their villages. The situation is making them anxious. They feel that being with more people and having the liberty to move around would have made it easier to deal with the situation. Being in Dharavi where people are confined to their homes, makes it a difficult situation.

This is what one of the respondents, who managed to go back to her family in the village, had to say:

"We came back home. The living conditions are harsh back in Dharavi. With no job to pay for the food and the number of cases rising, we decided to come home. We've been told that the rent will be eased for 3 months in Dharavi. We are counting on that for our decision to return. We are looking forward to going back to Dharavi."

- A mother of 4 in her early 40s who has been in Dharavi for 26 years

STORIES

Scattered

"My husband left for work 15 days ago to a place close to Mumbai but could not return due to the lockdown. We speak on the phone and I'm in a constant state of worry, now that it's just me and my son here in Dharavi. My elder son and his wife live in Karad, our hometown. Every day is a struggle here in Dharavi and we do need money to survive."

- A mother of 2 in her early 50s who has been in Dharavi for 11 years

Clean water

"Since the lockdown, we are getting better quality water than before. Previously, the water used to stink. We had to bath and even cook our food in dubious water."

- A 52 year old mother of 3 who has always been living in Dharavi

Medical aid

"I've gone through angioplasty and hysterectomy (surgical removal of the uterus) and I need medicines. I am unable to find all the required medicines. I am taking some on credit from the local pharmacy."

- A 47 year old mother of 2 who has been in Dharavi for 10 years

One day at a time

"We've been in Dharavi for 2 years and we don't have a ration card here. With no work to earn an income, it's difficult to feed ourselves. I have a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter. We are not able to score 3 meals a day, instead, we are surviving on 1 meal and sometimes 2 if we're lucky."

- A mother of 1 in her late 20s who has been in Dharavi for 2 years

Food

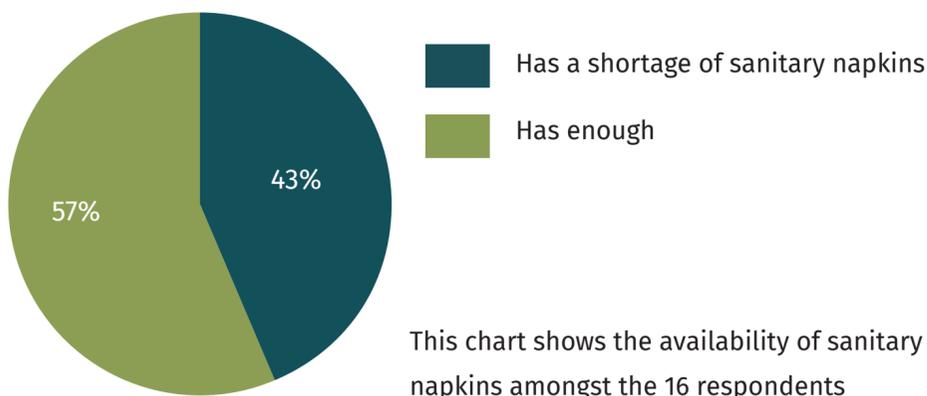
Another major concern is the availability of daily supplies. The price of regular items like supplementary food packages and toiletries have spiked after the lockdown. Women who have the responsibility to cook and feed the members of the house, feel that the biggest concern is the availability of food. They are struggling to provide a healthy meal to their families. There are individuals and organizations trying to help these families, but it isn't enough to feed every household. Families with adequate food are sharing with others.

“Many of us have not been taking the food provided by the NGOs to ensure that it can be used by people who need it more.”

- A mother of 2 in her mid 30s who has been living in Dharavi

Sanitary Napkins

Hygiene and proper sanitation in Dharavi are crucial in times of the pandemic. Most of the respondents do not have washrooms in the house and are dependent on public washrooms. This is certainly taking a toll on their personal hygiene. Many women stocked some sanitary napkins before the lockdown but with the medical shops being closed it is difficult to acquire more. Few women managed to get sanitary napkins from supermarkets through their personal contacts, while some are getting help from community leaders. Others are using a cloth, which is not an ideal choice.



Neighbours helping each other with equal distribution of food and supplies

Domestic Violence

According to one community leader, there is an increase in domestic violence cases during these times. Lockdown at home combined with anxieties around income and food has led to incidents of violence. It was reported that with women expecting help from their husbands at home, there were cases of conflict. This takes place on a regular basis and it changes the dynamic of the house.

Community leader at work *continuation of 'An egg a day' from Dharavi Weekly 03



Harshada distributing sanitary napkins in the community

Like many others, Harshada, a local social worker, is doing her bit to help the community. Being a part of the food supply chain, she was also covering a large area of Dharavi on an individual level. With her team of volunteers, she has been providing cooked food and ration to many needy families.

The food provided by the government lacks nutrition which is essential for people in quarantine for better recovery. When she realised this, Harshada started cooking food by herself on a large scale. Along with food, she also manages the supply of sanitary napkins. She is approaching organizations like Gunj, Educational institutions, and Mahila Bachat Gat (Women saving groups) for help. She also uses social media platforms to spread awareness and crowdsource necessary supplies. Public toilets are a major subject of concern when it comes to hygiene. Harshada and her team have provided sanitizers to many neighborhoods and also installed them outside of public restrooms.

“When I was distributing food, few ladies came to me and requested for sanitary napkins. There is no stock in the local medical stores. The government should address this issue along with food.”

- Harshada