Housing Insecurity among Renters in Slums: A Study from Noida City, India

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INTRODUCTION

More than 50% of the population residing in developing economies reside in urban regions (UNDESA 2022). A large chunk of this urban population is sheltered in the slums, as cities lack affordable housing options for low-income households (UN-Habitat, 2022). More than 1 billion people live in slums globally, and over half of slum dwellers live in East, South-East, Central, and South Asia (UN-Habitat, 2022). The lack of employment opportunities in backward states and villages pushes people toward cities like Mumbai, Delhi, etc. (Weinstein, 2021; Ezeh et al., 2017).

This study is based on Noida city in India. Noida City is part of India's National Capital Region (NCR). It is less than 20 km from New Delhi. The emergence of Noida slums is linked to the establishment of Noida city only. Noida was established through the Noida Act 1972. As per census 2011, the slum population is 11,500 households. However, the political groups of these slum settlements claim that there could be as many as 2 lakh households living in Noida slums. This population also includes renters, who comprise a large proportion of the slum population. Following the general trend in other big cities, Noida also came up with a plan (2009-10) to relocate the slum population to the periphery of the city. Noida Authority initiated allotting flats in 2020. This research aims to study how SRS impacts the lives of renters in slums and through which channels.

The slum population is not a homogeneous category. The literature on slums of different cities in India suggests that the slum population is rather heterogeneous in terms of religion, economic condition, employment, etc. (UN-Habitat 2003). Similarly, the Sector 8 slum of Noida also has a heterogeneous population. The heterogeneous population in slums reflects the persistent inequality in housing. For the specific objective of this research, the slum dwellers can be categorized into two categories - 1. People who do not move or get left behind (People who do not avail of the scheme), and 2. People who move to the houses provided under the

scheme. People who do not move to the public housing under the scheme can be further divided into further five categories - a. Prominent business families. b. People belonging to large families. c. Families with high income. d. Families with low income[1]. e. People living on rent[2]. The change in physical, economic, spatial, and political aspects of housing arrangements leads to changes in the social worlds of the residents (DeLuca, 2022). Housing policy, such as slum rehabilitation schemes (SRS), results in physical, spatial, and political change in the housing arrangements of slum dwellers. Under SRS, either in-situ housing is provided or housing is provided at a different location, mainly at the periphery. The existing literature suggests that housing change under SRS led to both kinds of change, i.e., in some, it improved the lives of people, and in some, it worsened the lives of people. The changes in the lives of slum dwellers mainly occur in terms of loss of livelihoods, increase in commuting time, poor housing allocation, gender relations, loss of social ties, health, etc.

Differential Housing Insecurity in slums

The Department of Health and Human Services (US) has defined housing insecurity as high housing costs in proportion to income, poor housing quality, unstable neighborhoods, overcrowding, or homelessness. (Cutts et al. 2011). DeLuca et al. 2022 and other scholars have added other characteristics to the definition of housing insecurity. Thus, housing insecurity also means - having minimal control over one's housing, being at risk of losing housing, being uncertain about tenure, or living in housing that does not meet basic household needs. As per the definition of housing insecurity, the slum population is a housing insecure population. However, the slum population faces **differential housing insecurity**. Different groups in slums will face different degrees of housing insecurity. Prominent business families or families with high incomes will have less housing insecurity than families with low incomes and living on rent.

In this study, the focus would be on housing insecurity among renters in slums. As per our knowledge, there are no studies that have studied SRS's impact on housing insecurity in the Indian context.

This paper focuses on the following research questions -
- Do different groups in slums experience different degrees of housing insecurity?
- Does the SRS increase housing insecurity among renters in the Indian context.

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[1] To avail of the benefit, slum dwellers have to pay Rs 5 to 7 lakh.
[2] Renters are not eligible for the housing benefit under the scheme. Across states in India, the slum rehabilitation schemes do not consider renters in slums as beneficiaries.

- How Housing Insecurity operates in the realm of slums.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The initial scholars who wrote on housing were - Du Bois (1900) and Louis Wirth (1936). Housing was central in their writings, and they were the first to study housing. They showed how economic, political, and physical aspects of housing shaped the social lives of people (Du Bois, 1903 and Wirth, 1947). Later sociologists (Gans 1962, Rainwater 1970) showed that slum neighborhoods had a distinct social life before they were demolished (DeLuca et. al., 2022). Then, there are scholars who commented on how urban renewal processes in cities affect the housing of the urban poor. (Jacob, 1961; Weinstein & Xuefei, 2009; Barry Wellman and Barry Leighton, 1979). Community assets and social fabric were destroyed in many urban neighborhoods by urban renewal (Jacobs, 1961). As per Jacobs, "city planners cannot revive neighborhoods simply through the location of streets, parks, and housing." Here, Bourdieu's theory of social capital is relevant as the social capital of slum dwellers is affected under SRS. SRS is a channel through which social capital is affected. Further, we have a theory of the Growth Machine propounded by Logan and Molotch, which says that the growth coalition promotes slum removal to maximize their returns to land. Gregory Squires (1991) extends the work of Logan and Molotch by examining the vested interests behind urban planning and development. Some scholars "situate evictions in the logics and practices of capital accumulation under conditions of neoliberal globalization" (Squires, 1991; Sassen, 2014; Harvey, 2012; Weinstein, 2021; etc.). Squires (1991) also questioned the political autonomy of the state in acting in the interests of the public (Squires, 1991). Peter Dreier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom (2001) like Logan and Molotch, "draw attention to the power of "place" or geographic location in determining future life chances for urban residents through differential access to quality jobs, resources, and public services" (Lin, 2013). As per them, the government in the neo-liberal era would want gentrified neighborhoods in place of slums. Moreover, referring to Sen, they studied the role of place in determining inequality by shaping and constraining ones opportunities to acquire income and attaining a quality life (Lin, 2013). Literature suggests that SRS in other parts of the countries posed challenges to people to get employment, loss of family ties and social networks, and their quality of life was also compromised (du Plessis 2005; Otiso, 2001). Another important perspective Dreier et al. give is that the city uses factors such as housing quality and price, neighborhood amenities, city

zoning, and land use regulations to exclude some residents and attract others (Dreier et al., 2001). SRS is also one mechanism to exclude people from the central city.

HOUSING INSECURITY - INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

Housing insecurity is studied by scholars of various disciplines like sociology, urban planning, social work, and public health; however, sociologists see housing insecurity differently. (Cox et al. 2016, Grier & Grier 1978, Lee & Evans 2020, Routhier 2018, etc.). Housing insecurity is majorly measured by taking into account - cost, affordability, housing quality, and residential instability. DeLuca et al. (2022) argue that "housing insecurity can be neither adequately measured nor understood as simply financial constraints or discrete events such as eviction." Sociologists view "housing insecurity as rooted in resource constraints that stem from structural inequalities, but also as situated within social relationships which create and dissolve housing arrangements and as exacerbated or remediated by supply-side actors and policy" (DeLuca, 2022; Desmond, 2012). Weinstein (2021) compares the eviction-led housing insecurity in America and the Global South. She argues that in America, evictions are rooted in the question of affordability, whereas, in the global south, affordability is not the only or primary cause of evictions. As per Weinstein (2021), in the global south, housing insecurity is shaped by a lack of formal rights, inadequate affordable formal housing, pursuit of development under the neo-liberal era, politically motivated evictions, and racial exclusion. Evictions and gentrification drives, such as under SRS, are nothing but efforts to attract investments and promote development, resulting in housing insecurity for the informal residents of cities (Bavishkar, 2006; Pithouse, 2008; Ghertner 2014; Weinstein 2014 and 2021; Bhan 2016; Chance, 2018; etc). Literature suggests that housing policy like SRS exacerbates housing insecurity for certain groups (Baradaran 2019, Rothstein 2017, Taylor 2019, Trounstine 2018).

RENTERS AND HOUSING INSECURITY

Rented accommodations are not new in cities. The first detailed sociological study on this was done by W. E. B. Du Bois. He showed that overcrowding was partly an outcome of the comparatively high rents. The African Americans in the Seventh Ward experienced high rent-to-income ratios. However, their neighborhood gave them easy access to employment opportunities in the city. Du Bois argued that Negroes paid high rents for the poorest accommodations; the homes used to be small and unhealthful. A similar analogy was provided by Gulyani et al. (2012) and other scholars on the slums in Nairobi and Dakar. As per Dreier

(1982), renters are an insecure class in America. Moreover, "renters are subject to their landlords' decisions and to the larger policy environment that provides them fewer protections than homeowners, making renters vulnerable to shocks such as urban renewal; to landlord-tenant law that provides landlords with far more protections than tenants." (DeLuca et. al, 2022) Social relationships also determine the level of housing insecurity among people living on rent. Various scholars have reported that families facing housing insecurity often seek help from their social networks for shelter (Clampet-Lundquist 2003, Edin; Shaefer 2015, DeLuca, 2022, etc).

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted data with 40 household heads to understand their experiences with rental housing in the Noida Sector 8 slum. Sector 8 slum is the first and the largest slum in Noida. The interviews were conducted from July 2023 to August 2023. The snowball sampling method was used for recruiting the participants. Semi-structured interviews with renters lasted approximately 40 minutes to 70 minutes. In these interviews, questions were focused on the quality of living conditions, access to amenities, housing type/size, income, expenses, rental rates, views on SRS, strategy after slum demolition, etc. Interviews were recorded verbatim. Data were transcribed, coded, analyzed for key themes. Interactions with landlords and local political group representatives were also conducted to understand the rental market and politics involved.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

1. Renters in slums are often overlooked by slum rehabilitation schemes; 2. They live precarious lives in extremely small rooms, and shared toilets are common; 3. They pay high rents for poor-quality housing; 4. SRS will worsen the housing insecurity among renters and will result in loss of social networks; 5. The expense on rent of the majority of the renters would increase substantially, as they would not get a rented house near to their workplace at rates that exist in the slums of Noida city; 6. They will need to find new jobs since their commuting time to the existing workplace will increase; 7. A substantial number of renters would return to their native village, which are stratified on caste lines, resulting in downward social mobility; 8. Unequal treatment by the local political groups and the civil society, i.e., they are a politically alienated group, etc.