

Institute of Social Studies Trust



# Emerging from the Lockdown: Insights from Women Waste Workers' Lives in Delhi

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## Abstract

Using a mixed-method approach of telephonic surveys and in-depth interviews with key informants and women workers, this study aims to assess the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has had on women waste workers and map the way their circumstances changed once the lockdown was lifted. It highlights that the lockdown has had a severe impact on work and income with more than 90% of the respondents stating that they experienced loss of employment during this period. The study also highlights that even after the lockdown was lifted, the workers have not been able to return to work immediately. This is because most godowns where they were employed before the pandemic remain closed even post-lockdown. The lack of waste to segregate has also contributed to the lack of employment. Workers stated that they find it difficult to collect waste, and even when they can, the lack of space for segregation has caused further challenges. They are also getting paid much lesser by godown owners than they were prior to the lockdown, and additionally, have had to sell their segregated material at significantly reduced rates. Even in terms of unpaid work, the report finds that the burden of household work and childcare has increased significantly. This poses a problem for women workers in terms of managing paid work. Women waste workers are struggling with accessing essential goods and services, including food, water, fuel, rent and children's education. This study recommends that as an immediate measure, waste workers should be provided with free ration kits until their employment situation stabilizes. It also suggests that the government fast track their registration as workers and create a tripartite board so that they have access to some social and economic protections through social welfare schemes. Along with this, it recommends that the government fix a standardized rate for the material that women waste workers segregate, and most importantly, give the workers a right over the waste they collect so that they do not remain vulnerable to exploitation.

## Acknowledgements

The Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) would like to thank Basti Suraksha Manch and Bal Vikas Dhara for extending their support in carrying out this study. Their help ensured that we had access to workers participating in the study from different parts of Delhi. We would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to Sheikh Akbar Ali from Basti Suraksha Manch, Debendra Baral ji and Mamta from Bal Vikas Dhara, and Dharmendra Yadav from Lok Adhikar, for taking out the time to talk to us and for providing us with key insights from their experience of working with waste pickers in Delhi. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Ashmeet, Ayesha, Vandana, Gayatri, and Monika Sharma from ISST for the support they provided in terms of data collection and transcription work. Most importantly, however, we are indebted to the women workers who agreed to take out their valuable time for the survey and share their life stories with us. We truly hope that this report is another step towards bringing recognition and value to their work and their need for social and economic protection.

## Introduction

In April–May 2020, the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) carried out a series of Rapid Micro Assessment Studies to understand the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown on women workers in Delhi employed in the informal sector as domestic workers, home-based workers, construction workers, street vendors, and waste workers<sup>i</sup>. With regard to waste workers, the studies found that 86% of these workers lost their employment due to the lockdown, as most godowns where they used to segregate waste had shut down. Men were also unable to carry out door-to-door collection due to the fear of disease contraction and police patrolling<sup>ii</sup>. Those who were able to collect and segregate some waste, did not receive the appropriate price for it from scrap dealers. The lack of visibility and recognition also meant that apart from the cooked food/ ration kits distributed by the government and civil society organizations, these workers did not get any financial support or help from the government. The godown owners also refused to pay them wages for the lockdown period, and a majority of the respondents of our study stated that unemployment and loss of income significantly exacerbated the stress caused by increased unpaid work and difficulty in accessing essential resources. The report also found that waste workers struggled to maintain the basic guidelines of COVID-19 prevention, as they could not afford easy access to soap and water, sanitizers, or masks. The study concluded that the lockdown had pushed women waste workers and their families into circumstances of abject poverty, social instability, and high morbidity<sup>iii</sup>.

The lockdown was lifted on May 25, 2020. However, the fear of the pandemic continues even now. While waste workers, like workers in other sectors, are trying to restore their employment circumstances to what it used to be prior to the lockdown, the situation, even now, is far from 'normal'<sup>iv</sup>. Thus, as a follow-up to its previous study, ISST now aims to understand and assess the impact that the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown has had on women waste workers of Delhi, and map the way their circumstances changed once the lockdown was lifted. It aims to highlight the significant changes that may have occurred to their paid and unpaid work situations, and discuss the coping mechanisms that they may have adopted to deal with such changes.

## Methodology

ISST partnered with Basti Suraksha Manch and Bal Vikas Dhara to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdown, along with the post-lockdown phase, on the livelihoods of women waste workers. The quantitative data for this study has been collected through telephonic surveys with 62 women waste workers and compiled using Google Forms, with all data-collection tools being translated into Hindi. The sample of respondents was selected in a purposive manner, and the results are not representative of the state in question or the country. The quantitative survey was conducted at the beginning of the study, and the qualitative survey tool was designed specifically to address the gaps identified during the quantitative survey. ISST researchers conducted 7 telephonic interviews (5 with the women waste workers and 2 with the stakeholders) based on access. Strict anonymity of the survey respondents was maintained, the purpose of the study made clear to them beforehand, and prior consent taken before the survey/interviews began. Participation in this study was voluntary and respondents were under no obligation to complete the survey/interview if they were hesitant or reluctant at any point. Care was taken to schedule calls at times convenient for the women workers, and precautions were taken during data collection to avoid undue distress to the respondents or their families. No questions that may hurt sentiments or may be discriminatory against any person based on caste, class, religion, race, gender or sexual orientation, were asked.

## Profiling the Waste Workers of Delhi: What Role Do Women Play?

Waste pickers constitute the bottom-most layer of the waste recycling pyramid in a city, and along with other actors in this complex chain, such as waste recyclers, *kabadiwalas*, and junk/scrap dealers, they form the 'informal' waste recycling sector and manage the burgeoning burden of waste in our cities. The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016,

defines “waste picker” as a person or groups of persons informally engaged in the collection and recovery of reusable and recyclable solid waste from the source of waste generation, that is, the streets, bins, material recovery facilities, processing and waste disposal facilities, etc., for sale to recyclers directly or through intermediaries to earn their livelihood [Rule 3(1) (58)]<sup>vi</sup>.

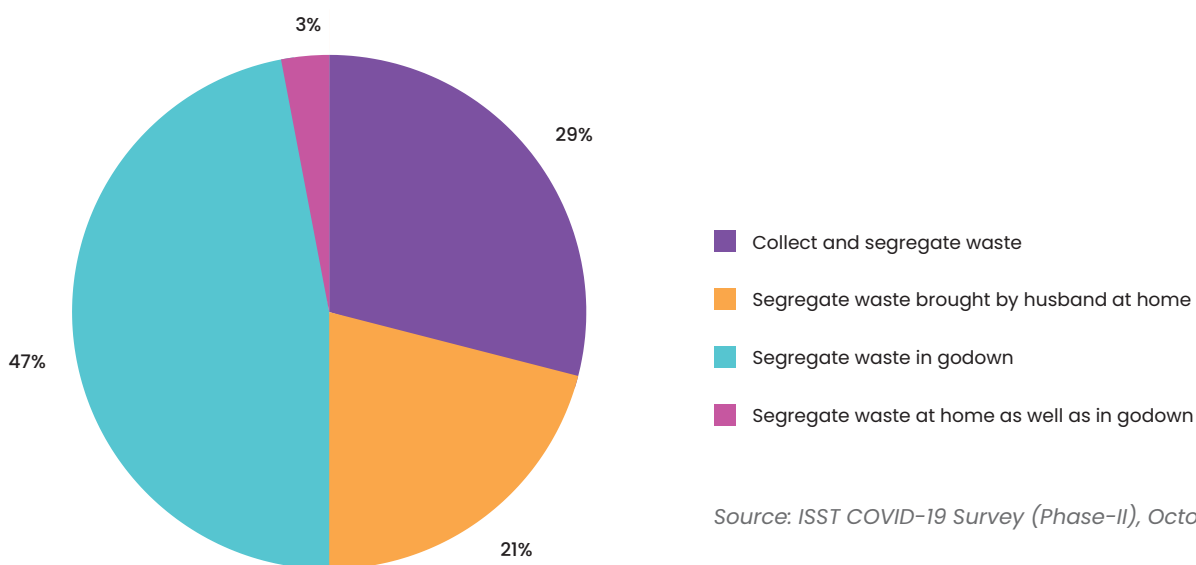
It is estimated that between the five Municipal Corporations of Delhi (MCD) comprising over 280 wards, the city generates approximately 14,000 tonnes per day (TPD) of solid waste<sup>vii</sup>. Although there is no official data, it is estimated that Delhi has over 1,60,000 people involved in informal waste picking and waste recycling, who collect 15-20% of its total waste (in terms of weight) and 55% (in terms of volume) and recycle about 2,000 tonnes of the city’s waste every day<sup>viii</sup>.

Typically, waste workers get work from an MCD employee (usually of the Valmiki caste) who has connections to the Residential Welfare Association (RWA) of the area. This MCD employee or their spouse acts as the supervisor and collects the user fee that comes from each house for garbage collection (Key Informant Interview (KII), Nov 2020). The waste picker has no right over this user fee and it is usually at the discretion of the supervisor to share some part of it. The waste picker’s income comes from the different varieties of plastic, bottles, metal, cardboard, paper, etc. that is segregated out of the waste and sold to scrap dealers for a profit. It is primarily women waste workers who are involved in this segregation work (KII, Nov 2020).

Women waste workers in Delhi either segregate waste in godowns as daily wagers or they segregate waste brought by their husbands at home as unpaid labour. Some also go out to collect waste with their husbands, but the segregation work largely remains their responsibility. It is important to note, however, that women in this whole cycle are probably the most marginalized. While the work they do is highly tedious and risky, they also have no agency in the process of selling the segregated material, and hence, have no right over the income that comes from it. In godowns too, they are paid lesser than their male counterparts for the same work and for the same number of hours, as godown owners usually believe that men work faster and help in loading and unloading (KII, Nov 2020).

The respondents of this study were found to be involved mainly in segregation work prior to the pandemic, with 47% working in godowns, 21% segregating waste at home, and 29% involved in both the collection and segregation of waste. 3% stated that they used to work in both godowns as well as at home (Figure 1).

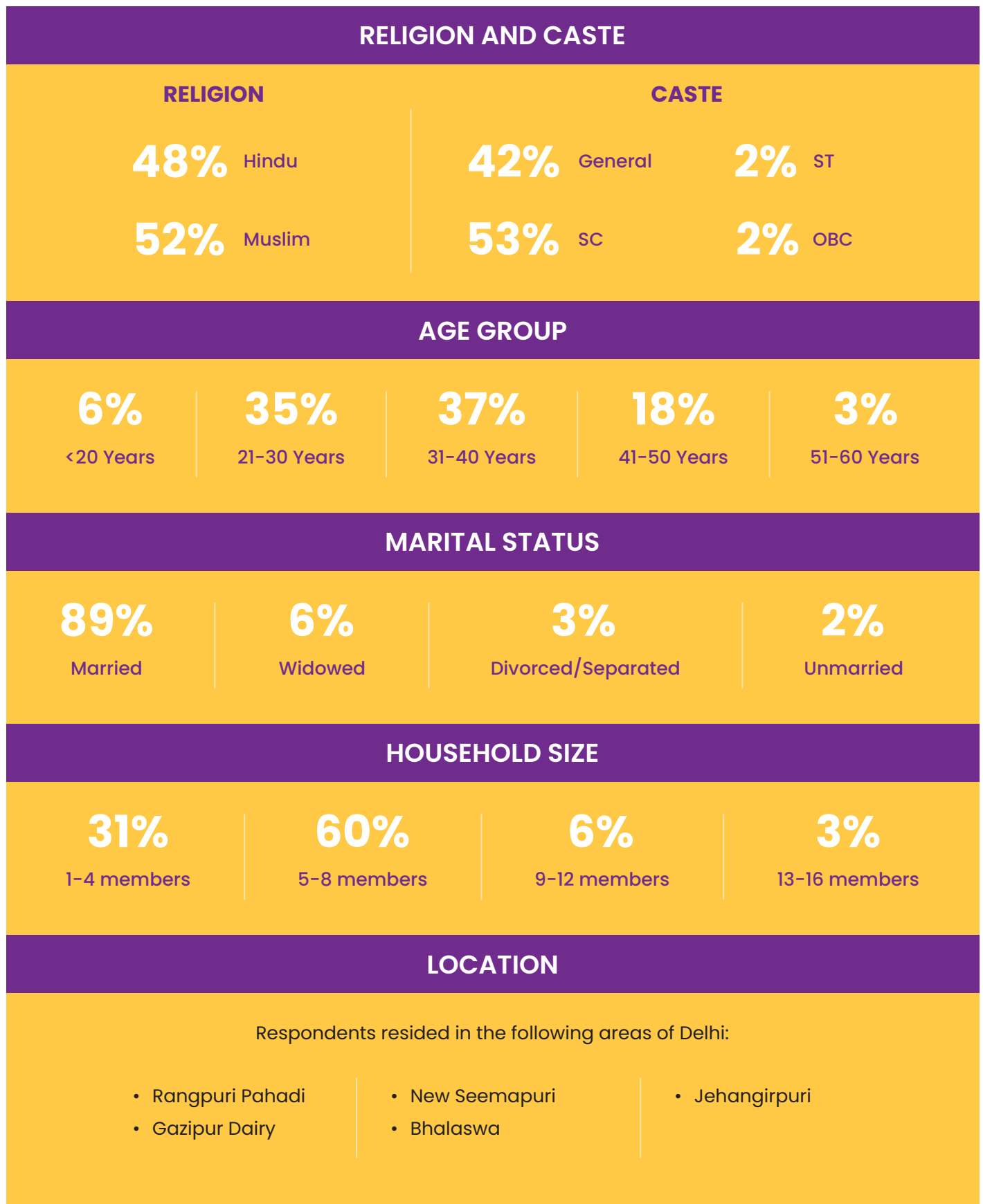
**Figure 1: Type of Work Prior to the Lockdown**



Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

The demographic profiles of the respondents show that 52% are Muslims while 48% are Hindus with 53% being from Scheduled Castes (SC). A majority of them are married, in the age group of 21 to 40 years, and living in a family size of 1-8 members (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents



Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October-November, 2020

## Impact on Paid Work

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, waste-picking work has been confronted by many challenges, most of them severely impacting the social and economic conditions of the workers. While reports suggest that waste pickers play a crucial role in handling urban waste, preventing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions<sup>x</sup> and helping municipal corporations avoid labour costs through their free civic service<sup>x</sup>, till date no steps have been taken to ensure that these workers receive economic and social protection. Their contribution to keeping our cities clean goes unacknowledged, and worse, they are regularly subjected to caste-based social stigma and harassment<sup>xi</sup>.

Dharmendra ji from Lok Adhikar informs us, "since a majority of the waste-picking community in Delhi are Muslims from West Bengal, they are often referred to as 'Bangladeshis' by the local people and police and are harassed from time to time" (Key Informant Interview (KII), November 2020). Their wages are most often below the legally mandated minimum wage, and since they lack any social or financial security net to fall back on, they are constantly struggling to make ends meet<sup>xii</sup>.

The entry of private players in waste management in Delhi in 2009 pushed waste pickers into worsening economic vulnerability. Reports suggest that the livelihood of waste pickers has been threatened since private companies have been given the responsibility of door-to-door waste collection in many parts of Delhi<sup>xiii</sup>. It has further been suggested that waste pickers now do not get enough waste to segregate as it is mostly diverted to the three Waste to Energy (WTE) plants currently working in Delhi. Women waste workers in particular are most affected by the entry of these private players. Sheikh Akbar Ali from Basti Suraksha Manch tells us, "wherever private companies have come in, women have not been getting the space for segregation. Earlier women used to segregate in the *dhalaos*<sup>xiv</sup> but now these spaces are under the control of the MCD and private players who have been assigned the work of transporting waste from the *dhalaos* to the landfills". This means that the access women waste pickers previously had to the waste lying in *dhalaos* is now restricted. Therefore, women, now, mostly segregate waste either at godowns as workers, or at home.

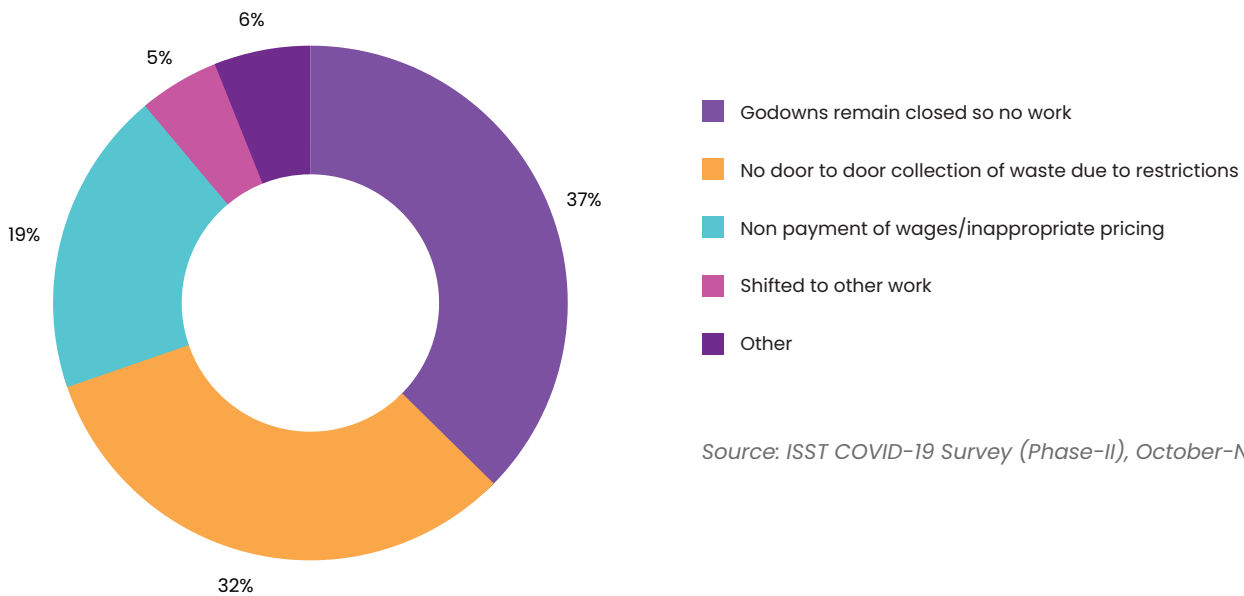
Sheikh Akbar Ali further adds, "private companies are coming because they know how much profit there is in this work and they also know that there are people to do this work. They are not getting people from outside. They are getting this work done by the waste workers, but the waste workers have no right over the waste". (KII, Nov 2020)



Women waste workers suffer from gender-specific issues as well. Dharmendra ji informed us that while women spend more than 12-13 hours segregating waste, there are no sanitation facilities (toilets or washrooms) for their use either in the godowns they are employed at, or in the *dhalaos*. Further, there is rampant sexual and economic harassment of the women workers by those holding power over them, including Class IV MCD employees (KII, Nov 2020).

When the lockdown was imposed by the Government of India in March 2020, this economic vulnerability of the women waste pickers and their families increased manifold. Since the godowns were shut and the collection of waste was restricted, a majority of waste pickers found themselves without work. Surveys conducted for this study highlighted that more than 90% of the respondents were severely impacted by the pandemic-induced lockdown (Figure 2). While 37% stated that they lost their work as the godowns were shut, 32% stated that they found it difficult to collect waste due to restrictions.

**Figure 2: Impact of Lockdown on Paid Work**

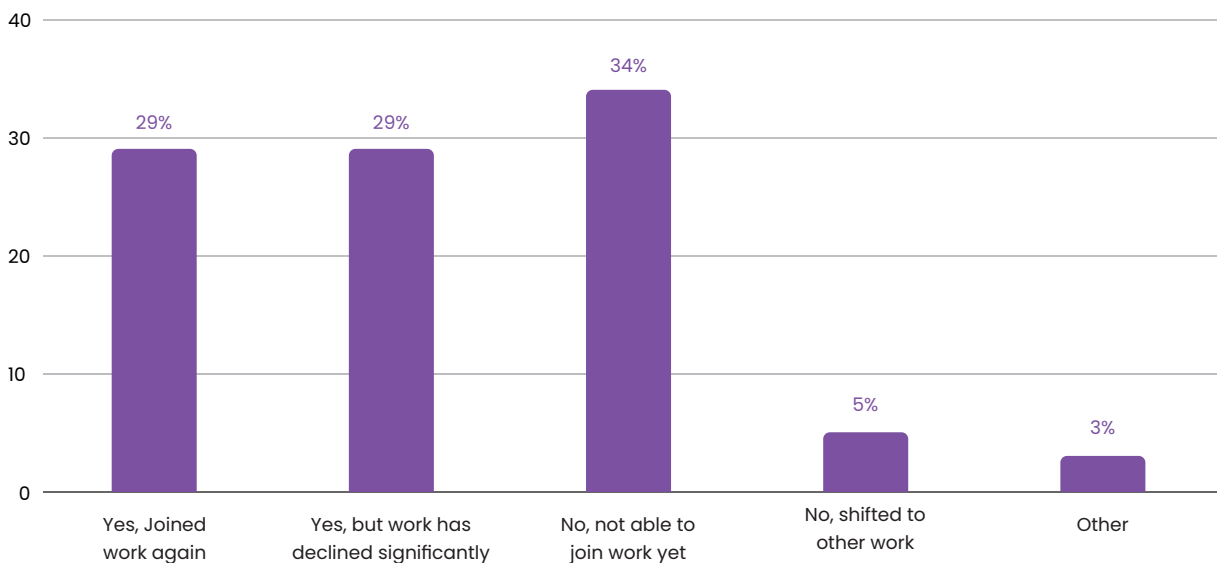


Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

Qualitative interviews revealed that women did not receive any wages from the godown owners during the lockdown period. Many had to throw away the collected waste since its sale became difficult as most scrap dealers also had to shut their shops. Those who were able to sell the waste had to do so at significantly reduced prices offered by the dealers.

Even after the lockdown was lifted, the workers were not able to get back to their work immediately (Figure 3). 34% of the respondents had not been able to get back to work even in Oct–Nov 2020, when the survey for this study was conducted. 29% of the respondents stated that they were working, but their work had reduced significantly due to the fact that the amount of waste generated as a whole had reduced. Sheikh Akbar Ali stated, “earlier 87 qualities of plastic were segregated for recycling, but since the lockdown, many factories have shut down. Now only 22 qualities are being segregated so work has also reduced”. (KII, Nov 2020). Women workers also informed us that they are no longer called to the godowns every day, and can only go when they are called. A worker said that even her husband does not go every day as there is simply not enough work.

**Figure 3: Work in the Post-Lockdown Period**



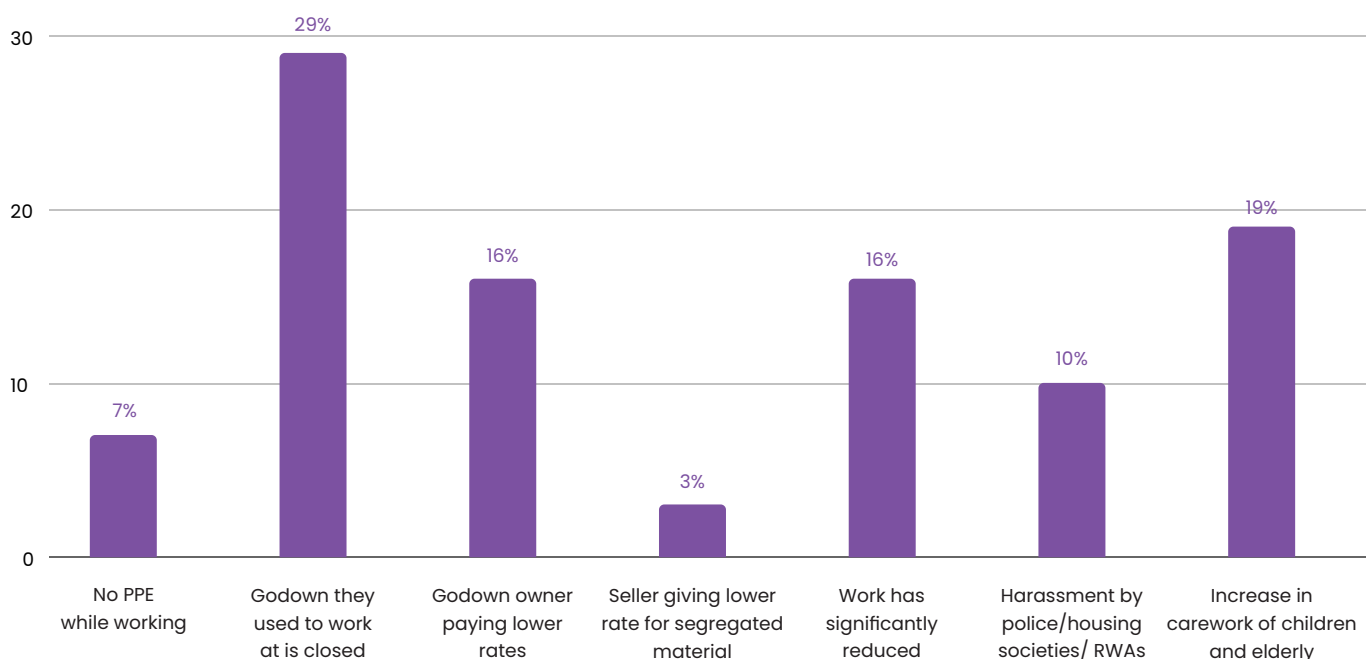
Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020



For those who were able to get back to work, there were many challenges. To begin with, some have had to work without any protection (Figure 4). Rajiya who works in a godown from 8 AM to 7 PM, and also segregates waste brought by her husband at home, told us that the godown owners have refused to provide any masks, gloves or sanitizers. Their explanation is that even they are struggling to survive and so are unable to think of workers' safety. Rajiya therefore had to purchase a mask herself, costing her ₹ 50 (Worker interview, November 2020). Dharmendra ji also argued that waste pickers provide an essential service like other frontline workers, and should be provided with protection kits (KII, November 2020). However, no initiative has been taken by the MCD to provide any protection kits to these workers.

Najma, who does door-to-door waste collection with her husband from houses in six streets of Jehangirpuri, informed us that they both segregate waste in the *dhalao* under three supervisors who take away all the user fees, but have not provided them with any masks, gloves or sanitizers. There is also no provision of soap and water at the *dhalao* and no one is concerned with social distancing. She does not wear a mask but her husband covers his face. She said, "*gareeb logon ko bimari ka kya darr lagega...*" (how can a poor person be scared of disease) (Worker interview, November 2020).

**Figure 4: Challenges in Post-Lockdown Period**



Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

Approximately 16% of the respondents informed us that godown owners are paying them even lower rates than what they used to prior to the pandemic. Rajiya explained that since the whole waste recycling sector is still not functioning as it did before, godown owners' income has also reduced and this reflects in the wages paid. She said, "*par ab guzara karna hain toh kum mein hi karna padega...*" (but since we have to survive, we will have to make do with whatever we are getting...) (Worker interview, Nov 2020). Similarly, Geeta, together with her husband, used to earn about ₹ 6,000 per month before the pandemic by working in a godown and also segregating waste brought by her husband at home. Her income has also reduced drastically (Worker interview, Nov 2020).

With regard to the sale of segregated waste to scrap dealers, it has been found that workers are forced to sell their segregated material at a very low price. Dharmendra ji stated, "it is true that since the lockdown, the rates of segregated material has decreased tremendously. For example, PET bottles were earlier sold for ₹ 35 each, but now the rate has gone down to ₹ 25. Paper and cardboard rates have come down from ₹ 12 to ₹ 6. Rates have been halved. We have also seen that many workers take loans from scrap dealers. So the scrap dealers further reduce the

rate to meet the loan. But the main problem is that there is no standardized rate. The workers don't know what they should get so they take whatever they are getting" (KII, Nov 2020).

Harassment from the police as well as from housing societies is another challenge that most waste pickers struggle with. Sheikh Akbar Ali in his interview stated that discrimination against waste pickers is not a new problem. Some people do not even let them touch their dustbins or give them a bottle of water if they ask for one, but now with the fear of COVID-19, the situation has worsened. Earlier, people would keep their waste outside their homes for collection, but because of the pandemic most housing societies do not even let waste workers enter the society gates. Sheikh Akbar Ali informed us that typically, in most residential societies, there is a space near the RWA office which is designated for waste collection. It is here that the waste pickers are supposed to segregate the waste. However, due to the pandemic, most RWAs are not allowing them to do so. If they try and do it outside the societies, local people object. Therefore, most workers are not able to segregate the waste properly and 30-40% is rejected as garbage. They are only able to segregate a few things, mainly those that are easily visible.

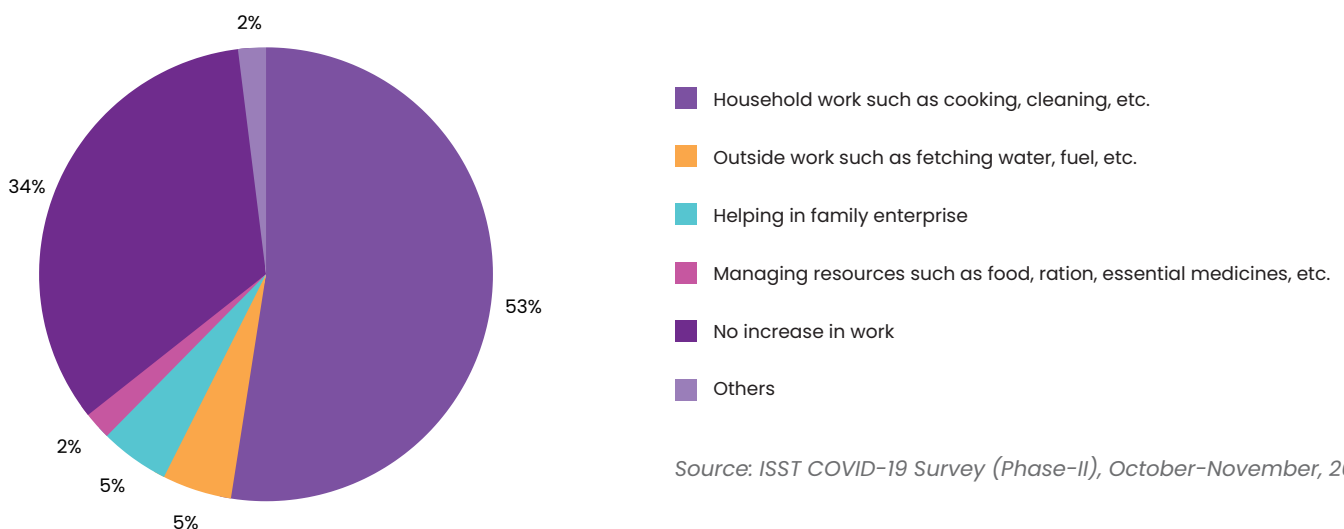
It has been seen that only 5% of the respondents were able to shift to alternate sources of employment (see Figure 2), and have found work as daily wage labourers. Some of them informed us that even though they could earn more as a daily wager (₹ 350 a day) than as a waste picker in godowns (₹ 200-220 a day), they have to go to 'Labour Chowk' every morning looking for work, and find it difficult to get employment on a daily basis. Sheikh Akbar Ali stated that looking for alternate sources of work for women waste pickers has proved difficult during the pandemic. Most sectors have been gravely affected, and it is difficult to find employment in other spaces as well. Shifting to alternate sources of work also requires investment, which most of these workers cannot afford. The other sector where they could have worked with their skill set and despite their lack of investment capacity is that of domestic work. However, considering that domestic workers themselves are currently struggling to get back to work, women waste pickers have found it a challenge to make this transition. (KII, November 2020).

Stakeholders were of the view that the government needs to understand and acknowledge the role that waste workers play in waste recycling. Sheikh Akbar Ali said, "If waste workers stop working, there will be mountains of waste everywhere. It is imperative that they are given a right over the waste and are also provided with space to do their work". (KII, Nov 2020)

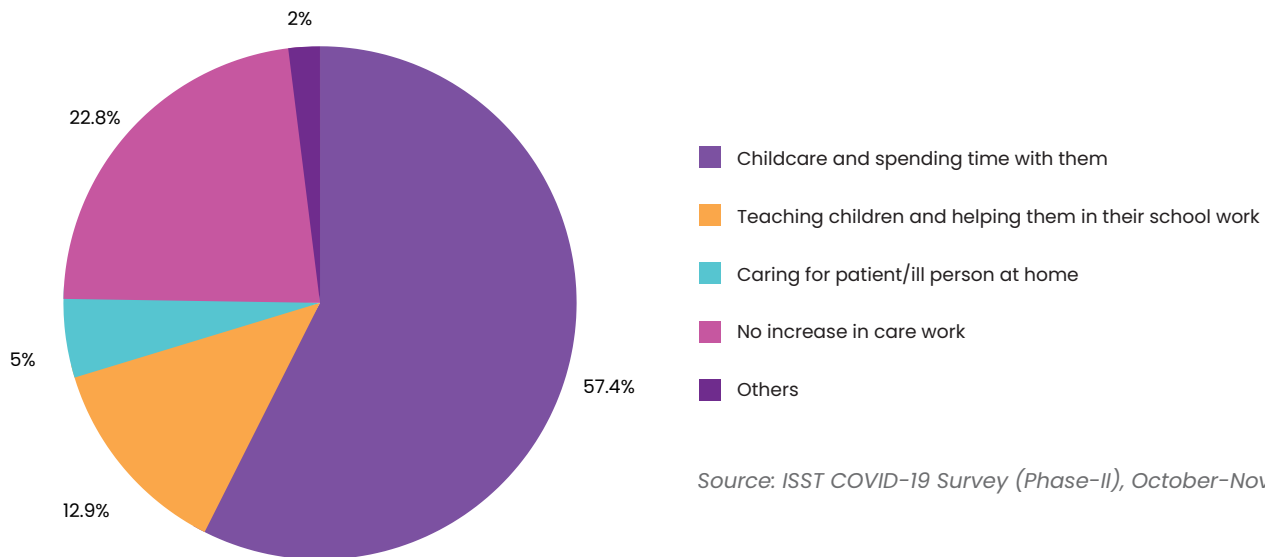
## Impact on Unpaid Work

About 53% of the respondents stated that they are experiencing a high increase in their unpaid household work while 71% stated that they were struggling with increased care work, specifically in terms of childcare, on account of continued school closure (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Increase in Unpaid Work Since Lockdown



**Figure 6: Increase in Unpaid Care Work Since Lockdown**

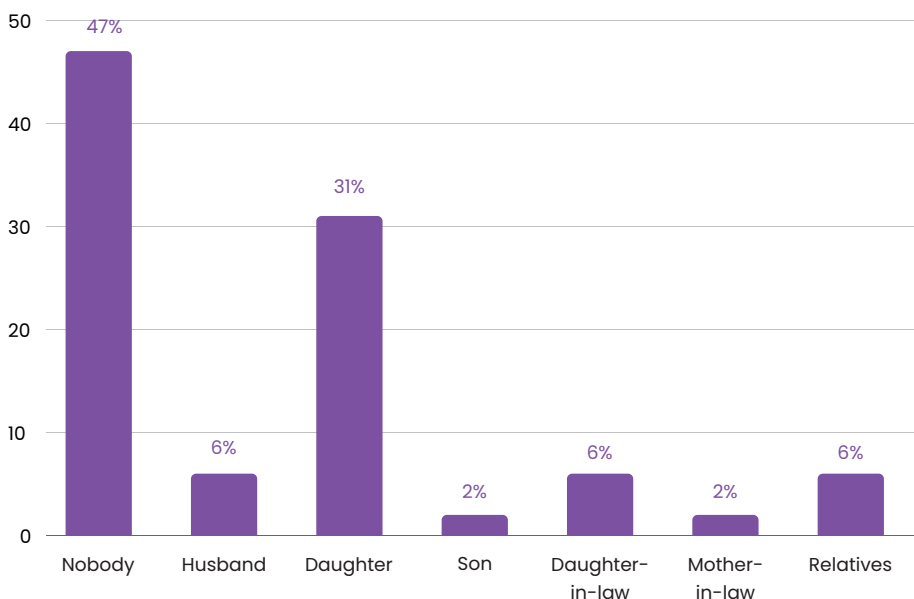


Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

The increased burden of childcare has made it difficult for many women in terms of returning to work. As many as 19% of the women stated that they are not able to go back to work or do what work they find properly since their children are now at home and have to be taken care of (Figure 4). Qualitative interviews also reveal that women are struggling in terms of managing their paid work along with the responsibilities of their unpaid care work. Rajiya told us that she carries her three-year-old daughter with her to the godown every day, where she stays till the evening with her, while Saira, a single parent of three young children (the youngest being a year old), informed us that she goes on *pheri*<sup>vi</sup> every night after 9 pm to collect waste from the streets of Shahadra to segregate and sell it to a dealer the next day. She has to carry her sleeping children with her as she has nowhere to leave them while she is away. Other workers with young children have also said that they find it difficult to work due to their care work responsibilities.

When asked who helps them in the household with unpaid domestic and care work, 47% of the respondents stated that they do not receive any help in the household, while 31% stated that their daughters helped them. Only 6% said that they received some help with household work from their husbands.

**Figure 7: Who helped with Unpaid Work?**

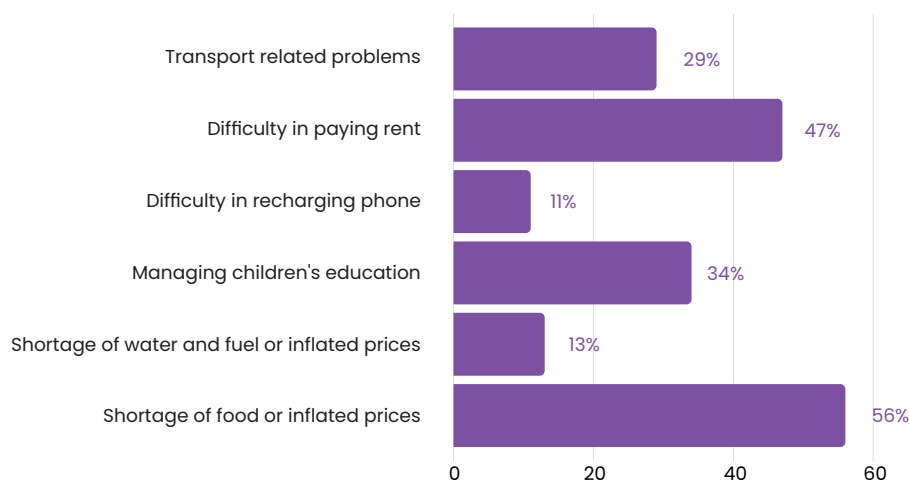


Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

## Challenges in Accessing Essential Goods and Services

The women waste pickers also faced significant challenges in accessing several essential commodities and services. Among these, the most significant are food items, water, fuel, housing, and children's education (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Major challenges during lockdown



\*Based on multiple responses

Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

About 56% of the respondents stated that they find it difficult to arrange for food items for their families. Since the lockdown was lifted, distribution of cooked food as well as ration kits by the government and civil society organisations has stopped. This has affected access to food as most of the workers do not have ration cards, and with significantly reduced incomes, they are in no position to purchase essential items in the market. Further, in areas like Rangpuri Pahadi, there is a huge shortage of water and hence, workers also have to purchase water at high costs. Most workers said that they find it difficult to get their gas cylinders filled and therefore try to procure wood for cooking food. Milk for children is another essential commodity that workers, specifically with young children, have struggled to purchase. While some help has been provided by organisations, such as Bal Vikas Dhara, Lok Adhikar, and Basti Suraksha Manch during and after lockdown, it has not been enough to sustain the workers. (Worker interview, November 2020)

Payment of rent is another issue that waste workers are struggling with. About 47% of the respondents stated that this is a major concern. During the lockdown, many house owners had allowed for delay in rent payments, providing much-needed relief to tenants, but after it was lifted, they have begun to demand rent again since they need it for their own expenses. This has forced many workers to migrate to the villages since they cannot afford accommodation in the city.

Additionally, managing children's education is a significant problem faced by the waste pickers. While 13% of the respondents stated that they now spend more time supporting their children with school work (Figure 6), 34% identify this as being a challenge they face (Figure 8). Qualitative interviews also reveal that waste workers have taken loans to purchase smart phones so that their children can attend online classes. Sheikh Akbar Ali informed us that their organization has started a makeshift school for children up to class 5 in Bhalsawa village, and many waste workers send their children to this school. Some who lived far away have requested the teacher of this school to take classes for the children in their respective areas as well and collected money to pay him. However, for most children, education has been compromised and mostly discontinued due to lack of money.

Arti Devi whose three children were studying prior to the lockdown, stated, "I was paying ₹ 500 for each of their tuitions, but now I can't afford it anymore. I also don't have a smart phone. It costs ₹ 9000 to ₹ 10000. I can't afford that as I have a daughter to marry off. So my children are not studying anymore. They have forgotten whatever they had learnt earlier" (Worker interview, November 2020).



Sheikh Akbar Ali suggested that instead of distributing books this year, the government could have made direct cash transfers for purchasing smart phones so that children could continue their education. At present, only 5% of the workers have children who are still continuing with their education (KII, November 2020).

In terms of access to health services, 68% of the respondents stated that they do not face any difficulty in accessing healthcare services. However, qualitative interviews reveal that workers are, in fact, too scared to go to any government hospitals for fear of contracting COVID-19. Therefore, they mostly go to local doctors or practice self-medication.

**Table 2: Difficulty in Accessing Healthcare Services**

Medical Challenges	Percentage of Women Respondents
Difficulty in accessing health care services in relation to COVID-19	8%
Difficulty in accessing health care services in relation to diseases other than COVID-19	16%
Difficulty in accessing health care services in relation to reproductive health problems	5%
No difficulty in accessing health care services	68%
Others	3%

Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

The survey also found that none of the respondents stated that they or any of their family members or relatives had contracted COVID-19. The qualitative interview further probed this, and it was found that in spite of camps being organised by the government for free COVID testing in their area, waste workers did not get themselves tested. This is because they were worried that since they handle waste, they may have contracted the infection, but if they were to test positive, they would not be able to go out to work (KII, November 2020).

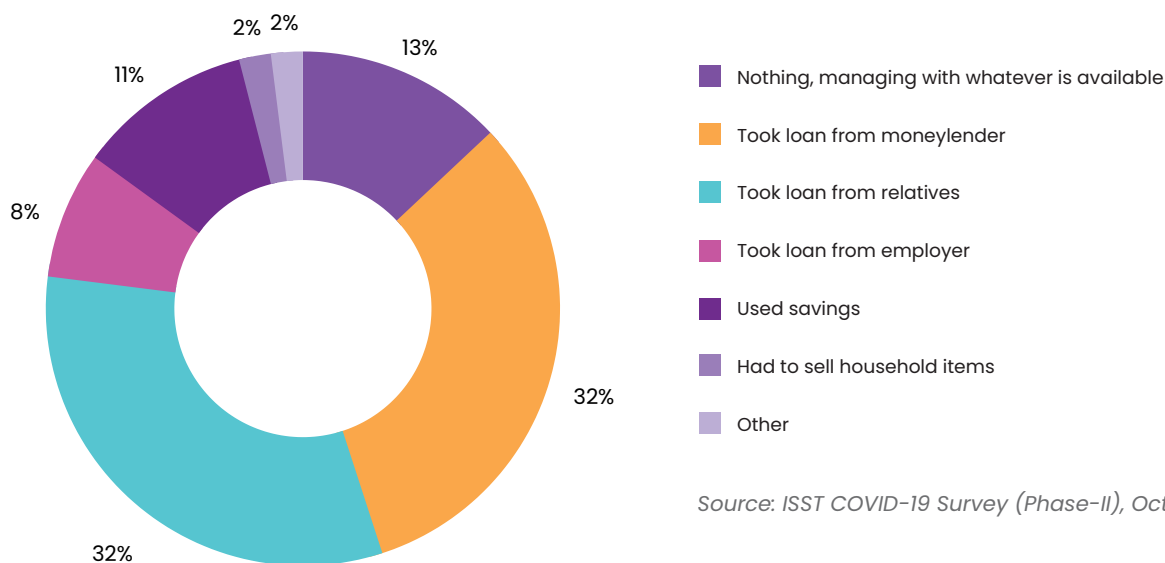
## Coping with the Financial Crisis: Strategies and Mechanisms

Even before the pandemic, waste workers would depend on their day to day earnings, and were unable to save money. When the lockdown was announced, all sources of income dried up. With no financial support from the government, many have had to take loans from various sources to make ends meet. The survey found that about 72% of the respondents have borrowed money – 32% from moneylenders, 32% from relatives, and 8% from employers, i.e., godown owners and scrap dealers (Figure 9). Only 11% stated that they had savings they could use to sustain themselves during the lockdown, and 13% stated that they managed with whatever little they had.

In qualitative interviews, workers also informed us that they have had to take loans for other reasons as well. Arti Devi, a waste picker who segregates waste in a godown, was in her village at the time of her interview. She said that she could not work for almost three months during the lockdown, and hence, had to take a loan for basic survival. Her daughter's wedding had been arranged prior to the pandemic, and since the groom's family was threatening to break

off the alliance if the wedding did not take place soon, she had to take another loan of ₹. 1.5 lakhs from a moneylender, to be paid back with interest, for making wedding arrangements.

**Figure 9: Coping with Financial Crisis**



Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

Workers in the interviews also stated that apart from cooked food and ration kits, they have not received any monetary help from the government. Since most of them do not have Jan Dhan accounts, they have not received any of the announced cash benefits either. Some have had to return to their villages as they were unable to pay rent in the city.

This economic crisis has put workers under tremendous stress. Almost half of the survey respondents stated that they are very worried about the financial distress that their family was going through. 32% also stated that they are tired and stressed at all times.

**Table 3: Impact of COVID-19 Induced Lockdown on Mental Health of Women Workers**

Impact on Mental Health	Percentage of Women Respondents
I'm always tired and stressed	32%
I'm extremely stressed about the financial situation of my family	48%
I feel stressed as my children are home all day	6%
I am stressed as my husband has no employment	2%
No, there is no impact, everyone is fine	11%

Source: ISST COVID-19 Survey (Phase-II), October–November, 2020

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the lockdown imposed to control its spread, has worsened the social and economic circumstances of women waste pickers and their families in several ways. With no social and financial security net to rely on, they are finding it difficult to rebuild a life and a livelihood in the city. It is imperative that necessary steps are taken by the government to support them and bring recognition to the important contributions they make to urban societies.

The following are some recommendations which may go a long way in easing the crisis that women waste pickers and their families are currently facing:

The government must conduct a survey to estimate the number of waste workers currently working in Delhi.

All waste workers must be provided with ID cards and should be recognized as workers. They should also be provided with necessary protection gear to be used while working.

A tripartite board, like the one for construction workers, must be set up for waste workers. Social welfare schemes targeted at waste workers should be implemented and funded by the tax money collected under the Swachh Bharat initiative.

A standardised rate should be fixed for the material that they segregate and sell so that they are able to negotiate with scrap dealers for appropriate pricing.

The government should extend the provisioning of free ration kits to all informal sector workers for at least 6 more months i.e., mid of 2021.

The construction of toilets and drinking water facilities near dhalaos and godowns should be taken up on a mandatory basis.

A taskforce must be set up by state labour ministries for recommendations for long-term relief to waste workers and protection of their rights.

More research should be conducted to collect evidence and study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on waste work across countries for wider regulation, social security measures, and decent work conditions for women waste workers.

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- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Refer end note vi and ix
- <sup>xiv</sup> Large community bins where waste pickers come and drop their collected waste for segregation.
- <sup>xv</sup> Informal labour hubs or hotspots
- <sup>xvi</sup> To go to markets or roadsides for collection of waste



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