



EDUCATIONAL URBANISM AND URBAN DISTRESS IN MUKHERJEE NAGAR: A CASE STUDY OF INSECURITIES AND CHALLENGES IN INDIA'S ICONIC COACHING HUB

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Mukherjee Nagar has emerged as one of India's largest education-hub for government job aspirants and other competitive examination candidates. Thousands of students migrate annually from various states to this classic coaching cult house in search of affordable rental accommodation and coaching related facilities. However, the haphazard development of the coaching and paying guest (PG) ecosystem has generated severe urban stress in the locality. This study used both primary survey and secondary literatures to examine how infrastructural inadequacies affect the everyday life, health and overall well-being of students due to uncertain water and food quality, sanitation, traffic and public hygiene etc in the very student centre. The findings show that population pressure, unregulated PG accommodations and inadequate public infrastructure have created a difficult living environment for aspirants. The paper recommends integrated urban governance, regulation of PG accommodations, improved water management and student welfare policies.

Keywords: *Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi, coaching hubs, urban infrastructure*

Introduction

Urban haphazard development and consequent problems are nothing new in India in general and Delhi in particular. Among few private coaching- educational clusters in India, Mukherjee Nagar shares a historic placement. Located in North-West Delhi, the area has evolved into one of the largest hubs for government job Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and other competitive exam preparation. Every year, thousands of aspirants migrate from states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana etc to this locality. Originally developed as a residential colony cluster, Mukherjee Nagar gradually transformed into a densely packed coaching cluster, turning pre-existing houses into hostels, libraries, coaching institutes, PG accommodations, food stalls, photocopy centres, stationery shops, and rented rooms. Though the expansion has become the bread earner for the locality, but it has also generated severe infrastructural stress, such as overcrowding, improper sanitation, poor drainage, unsafe electrical infrastructure, irregular water supply, and unhealthy fooding. Students living in small rented rooms get exhausted with long hours of study under hazardous environment. With water shortages during summers, unhygienic bathrooms, poor waste disposal system, and unhealthy food quality in PG facilities, their physical health, mental stability, and academic productivity is further deteriorated each passing day.

Bhan (2022) argued that access to basic urban services in Delhi is often guided by governance structures and policy priorities, resulting in unequal distribution public infrastructure. Padhan (2023) found that students are overlooked in urban planning despite their growing contribution to local economies. Singh and Sharma (2025) have found that service provision in densely populated urban settlements is often disturbed by careless institutions. The UN-Habitat (2022) World Cities Report highlighted that growing urban areas often experience environmental degradation, service deficits when haphazard development takes place. World Health Organization (2022) identified sanitation, waste management and access to safe water as fundamental determinants of urban well-being.

During the previous 3 decades, the locality became popular because of relatively affordable housing and proximity to Delhi University. Over time, coaching institutes expanded rapidly. The locality became associated with UPSC and other govt. job preparation, particularly among Hindi-medium aspirants. The educational economy gradually reshaped the entire urban landscape. Temporary urban population, created by educational migration remain neglected in city planning in such cases, since the infrastructure was originally designed for a smaller residential population, but the massive influx of aspirants despite of

limited civic capacity has placed extraordinary pressure on it. This paper seeks to understand how everyday lives of students are shaped by infrastructural deficiencies and how the absence of effective governance escalates it by examining the nature of urban challenges, especially water scarcity, food quality, sanitation conditions and cleanliness in the locality. The rapid commercialization created multiple urban pressures, out of which, 6 major impacts were recorded in pilot survey in the study area (figure 1).

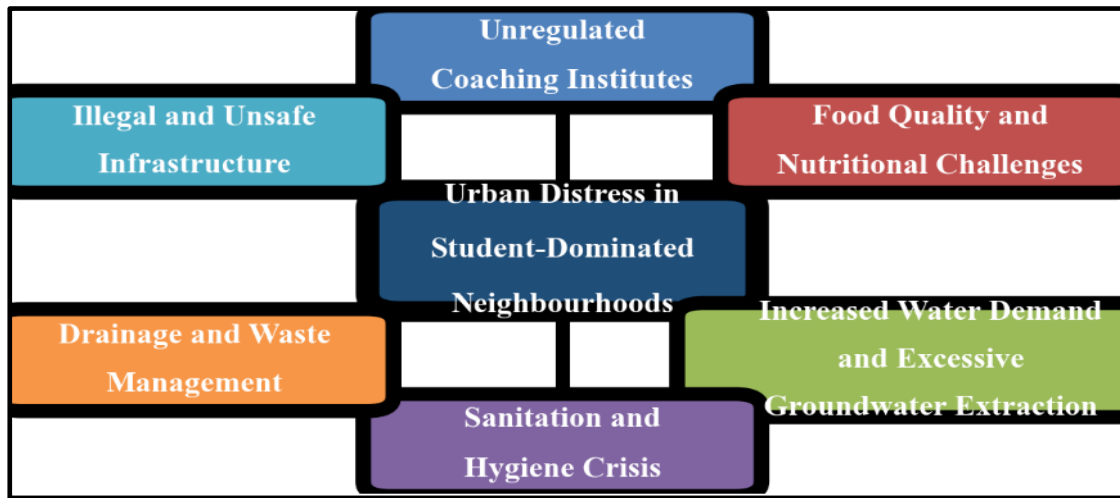


Fig. 1: Six major Urban Distress Dimensions

Study Area

Mukherjee Nagar is located in the north-western part of the North Delhi district of National Capital Territory (NCT), India. The locality lies approximately between 28°41'–28°42' North latitude and 77°10'–77°11' East longitude, with an average elevation of about 215–220 m above mean sea level. Geographically, the area forms part of the north Indian alluvial plains (Yamuna River system) and exhibits a flat topography with gentle gradients and experiences a semi-arid climate characterized by extremely hot summers, monsoon, and cool winters. Average annual rainfall ranges between 700 and 800 mm. Originally developed as a residential colony, Mukherjee Nagar has undergone rapid land-use transformation since the last 3 decades, due to the expansion of coaching institutes, student hostels, paying guest (PG) accommodations, libraries, food outlets, and other educational support services and has emerged as one of India's largest coaching hubs for competitive examinations. The study area map is shown in figure 2.

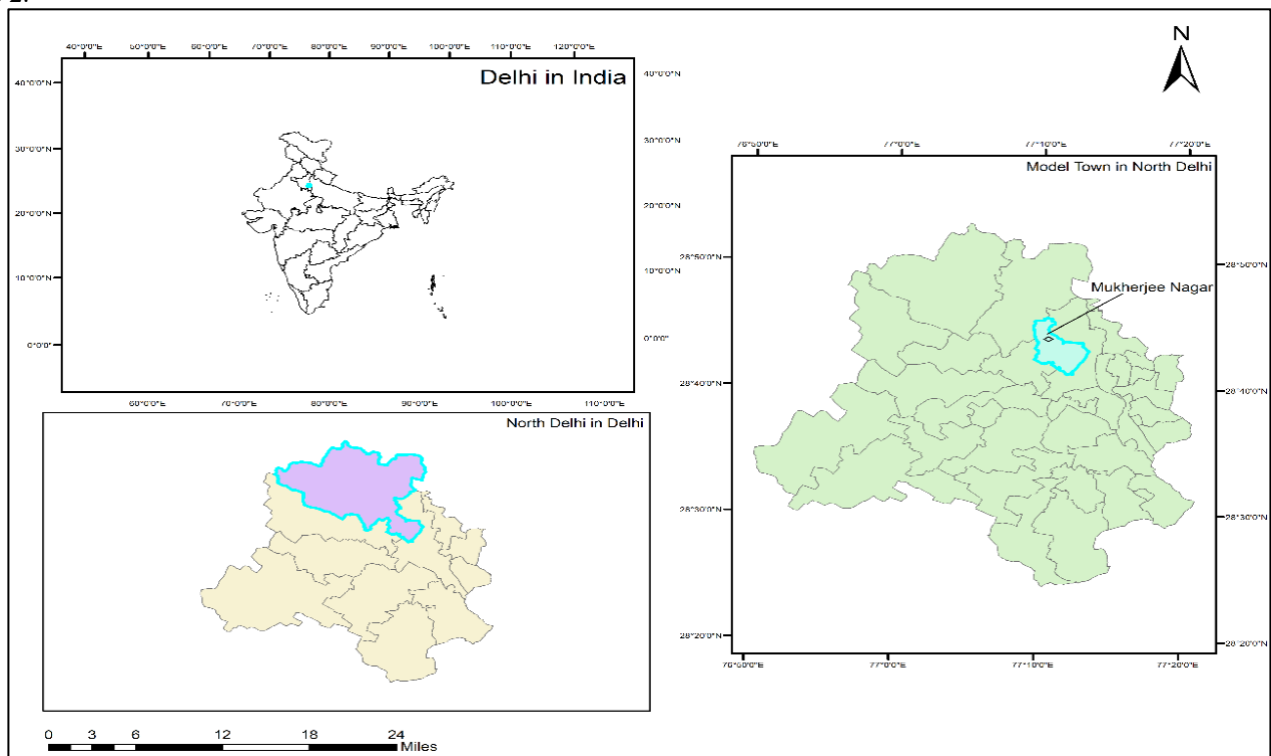


Fig. 2: Study area map

Dataset and Methodology

The study is based on both primary data and secondary sources including newspaper reports, research articles, media investigations etc. 200 students residing in 20 Paying Guest (PG) in Mukherjee Nagar were selected by random sampling for structured questionnaire interview to assess students' perceptions regarding six major dimensions of urban distress (Unregulated coaching institutes, Food Quality and Nutritional Challenges, Increased water demand and excessive groundwater extraction, Sanitation and hygiene crisis, Drainage and waste management, Illegal and unsafe infrastructure) was used based on 3 points scale, i.e.- 1 for poor, 2 for average and 3 for good. Rental category was divided into 3 categories, i.e.- 1 for 5000- 10000, 2 for 10000 to 15000 and 3 for more than 15000 rupees per month. Percentage analysis and Chi-square tests were performed at 95% confidence level to evaluate the association between PG rent categories and students' satisfaction levels across the six dimensions. The methodology flowchart is presented in figure 3.

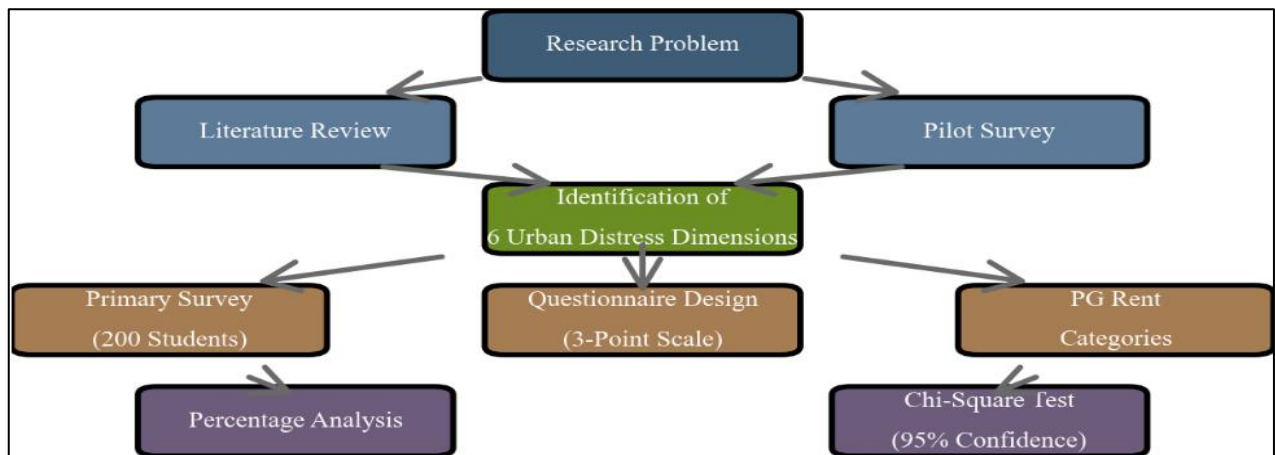


Fig. 3: Methodology Flowchart

Results and Discussion

The descriptive statistics of percentage of respondents in all 3 categories of satisfaction scale has been presented in figure 4.

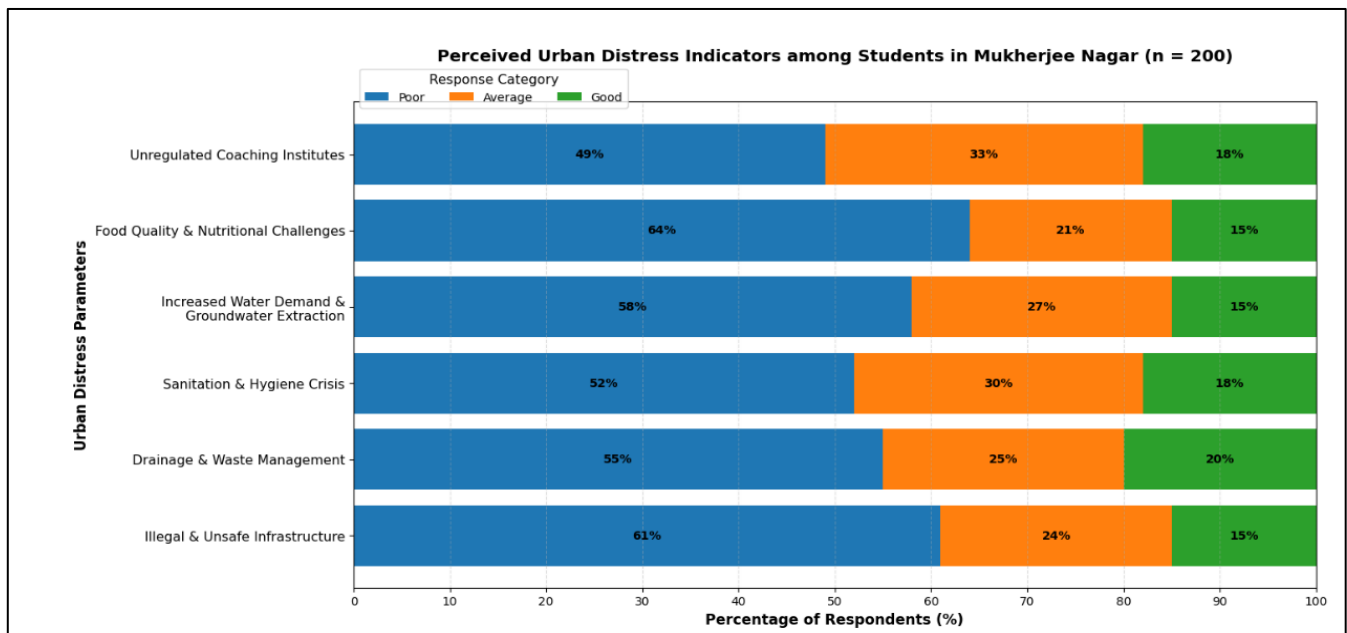


Fig. 4: Descriptive Statistics Results

Unregulated coaching institutes

49% of respondents rated the coaching institutions regulation as poor. Recent events highlight safety concerns in coaching centres and PG facilities. A fire incident in 2023 injured more than sixty students in the area. Post- investigations revealed violations related to fire safety and electrical wiring. The situation became nationally significant after the 2024 basement flooding tragedy in a famous coaching centre building of Delhi. Following this incident, authorities intensified inspections, where multiple establishments were found violating safety norms related to ventilation, fire safety, basement usage, emergency exits etc.

Increased water demand and excessive groundwater extraction

58% of respondents perceived water availability and quality as poor. Delhi in general and Mukherjee Nagar in particular experience significant summer water stress due to overpopulation, unequal access and limited sources. Heavy dependence on one river system, i.e.- Yamuna and groundwater extraction leads to severe water stress. Irregular municipal supply leads to dependence on water tankers and polluted water sources like Yamuna canals. During summer months, students often complain about long queues for bathing and washing, poor-quality water, sometimes turning brown or yellow, leading to both physical and mental health damage due to daily struggles for basic amenities. Students living on upper floors suffer the most due to low pressure. Rapid commercialization has increased groundwater extraction, creating seasonal water shortage. Cheaper PGs do not hesitate providing untreated water, risking lives to anxiety, frustration and water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid etc.

Food Quality and Nutritional Challenges

Food quality and nutritional challenges constitute the most severe concern among respondents, with nearly two-thirds of sampled students (64%) rated food quality as poor. Students often depend on PG food, roadside snacks, or low-cost tiffin services due to financial limitations and prepare food themselves rarely due to academic burden, indicating affordability rather than nutrition, multiplied with poor hygiene, repeated use of oil, lack of fresh vegetables etc. Unhealthy dietary intake produces health problems like gastric issue, fatigue, vitamin deficiencies etc. Students frequently complain about unhygienic kitchen system and fooding of PGs, indicating profit maximisation gang in work. Continuous consumption of unhealthy food affects long-term physical and mental health.

Sanitation and Hygiene Crisis

Nearly 52% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with sanitation and hygiene facilities in PGs. Narrow lanes and overcrowded buildings create unhealthy living conditions, challenging the hygiene, sewage and waste management of the locality. Dirty shared washrooms, improper waste collection and overflowing drains with foul smells houses Mosquito breeding centres, with drainage systems blocked especially in the monsoon.

Drainage and waste management

55% of respondents reported poor drainage and waste management conditions. Delhi is historically prone to urban flooding due to inadequate drainage, causing waterlogging and contaminated water borne disease transmission, further escalating into electrical hazards and reduced mobility induced by poorly regulated basement structures and haphazard road network. Enormous quantities of waste generated daily does not see the fortune of efficient disposal system. Open dumping, irregular municipal waste collection vehicle appearance and poor segregation practices etc result into environmental degradation, thereby reducing overall life span of people.

Illegal and unsafe infrastructure

61% of respondents rated the infrastructure as poor due to overcrowded rooms, inadequate ventilation, unsafe electrical wiring, and limited fire-safety arrangements as major concerns. Most residential buildings are modified into PGs without adequate compliance with safety regulations, proper municipal documentation and police verification, leading to small poorly ventilated rooms with illegal basement accommodations, lacking in fire and other safety infrastructure. PG owners avoid giving rental agreements to students, therefore no accountability is legalised in case of any hazard, even demise of students due to faulty infrastructure, including narrow staircases, old balcony and railings, poor ventilation, unsafe electrical systems etc. Students from economically weaker backgrounds compromise on hygiene, safety and comfort to reduce cost of living in this heavy PG demand area, leading them to experience loneliness, competition simultaneously in the absence of recreational green areas.

Chi-square test results

Chi-square tests of independence were performed between PG rental category and each of the six dimensions to assess variability of living conditions with varied rental categories and the results are shown in figure 5. The results demonstrated statistically significant associations in all cases (P value < 0.01). Strong associations value (χ^2) were found for food quality (80.71), water conditions (75.75) and infrastructure (62.71). Significant relationships were also found for sanitation and hygiene (55.05), drainage and waste management (49.03), and coaching regulation (25.72). This in turn indicates that students residing in expensive PGs experience relatively better living conditions than those residing in low-rent accommodations, the pattern highlighting how economic capacity influences access to basic services, reflecting concerns of urban inequality.

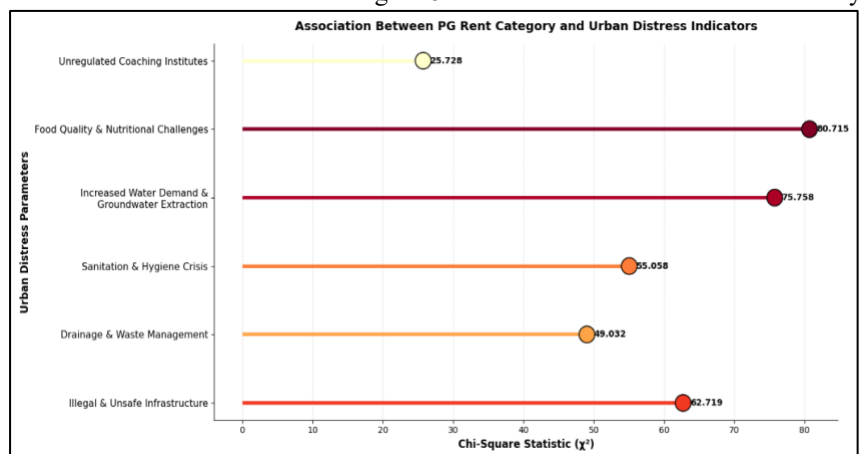


Fig. 5: Chi-square Test Results

Discussion

Mukherjee Nagar exhibits a typical educational aspiration driven migration pattern, centred around competitive examinations. Governance and planning failure with regards to weak regulation of PG accommodations, poor enforcement of building laws, inadequate sanitation and drainage infrastructure and weak waste management systems and limited grievance mechanisms expose lakhs of students to risks. Despite massive student population, there is little urban policy specifically focused on them. It's growth reveals how urban infrastructure collapses when population concentration occurs without planning. Students are not mere consumers of coaching services, rather, are citizens whose rights to dignified living conditions must be protected. Questions about the commercialization of education in India should be raised by government and non- governmental bodies. Coaching economies is the bread earner of the locality, but student welfare still remains ignored. Sustainable urban development requires balance between economy and human dignity.

Authorities should establish mandatory registration and inspection systems for PGs and hostels and establish minimum criteria with regards to room size, ventilation, adequate water supply, sanitation, fire and other safety chain mechanism and proper waste disposal system. Water quality monitoring, rain water harvesting and mandatory water purifier set up should be watched upon. Local authorities must improve upon drainage systems, sewage networks, municipal waste collection frequency and mosquito control measures by cleaning the water tanks and coolers properly, especially in summer. Regular inspections of PG kitchens should be conducted. Dedicated student support systems are necessary along with proper complaint redressal mechanisms. Educational hubs should be recognized as special urban zones.

Conclusion

Mukherjee Nagar locality exhibits both aspiration and planning failure. Thousand dreams of social mobility are forced to live in struggle and survival mode. This multi- dimensional crisis reflects social segregation and deeper inequalities within urban governance in this economically vibrant locality. Water and sanitation failures, unsafe infrastructure pose threat to brilliant students. Unsustainable educational urbanization should be stopped way before reaching the zenith. An urgent sustainability drive is required for the students preparing for the nation's toughest examinations. Urban planning should treat students as future of India. A more sustainable pathway will lead to better implementation of SDG- 3,6 and 11 simultaneously, hence require immense support from the public stakeholders.

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