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Socio-Educational Challenges of Slum-Dwelling Children: A Study of Mangolpuri's Resettlement Colony

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ABSTRACT

The Right to Education (RTE) Act, got the majority of urban children of India enrolled in school, but children living in resettlement colonies are still stuck on the edge, excluded from real learning just like the mainstream. This study tries to findout what children (n=35) and their parents (n=8) actually go through in Mangolpuri Resettlement Colony, North-West Delhi. The research takes a close qualitative look and uncovers a Three-Layered Barrier that blocks academic outcomes of children which are: physical obstacles, economic struggles, and institutional failures. The findings reveals that about 88% of these kids try to study at home, but less spaces and continuous unusual noise make it next to impossible. The public school system really isn't working for them, so families especially those barely scraping by end up spending more than 15% of their income on private coaching. It's a Coaching Trap, and there's no way around it. When researcher tries to break it down by gender, things get even more complex. Girls face a strict Safety Curfew, which stops them from moving freely for education at evening, on the other hand boys deal with the pedagogic alienation they don't feel connected to the school system and they mostly drop out early, resulting in informal work. Pulling these stories together, the study argues that just getting enrolled isn't enough when children don't get the space and support they need for the study. For Mangolpuri's so-called Midnight Learners, school is nothing more than a place to get certified—the real

fight for education took place at home. The study concludes, with a call for change: community study centres are required to address the growing education gap, mostly in resettlement colonies.

Introduction

The Global Crisis of Urban Marginality and Education

At present majority of the people living in urban areas throughout the world, because of this twenty-first century is marked by an extraordinary urban turn. However, this growth is not a uniform story of progress. but, it is increasingly characterised by what (Davis 2006) terms the "urbanisation of poverty." As metropolitan hubs expand, they do not merely grow outward; they produce internal peripheries slums, shantytowns, and informal settlements, where the promise of urban prosperity remains a distant, often invisible, reality. In these contested spaces, "urban marginality" is far more than a simple lack of income. As (Wacquant 2008) argues, it is a compound state of spatial and social "advanced marginality" that dictates the life chances, health, and dignity of its inhabitants.

Education is marketed as the primary vehicle for upward movement and the only escape from the cycle of generational poverty., for the children of resettlement colonies. Yet, this promise often falls short. Sociological research suggests that, rather than acting as an equaliser the school system often functions as a "sorting machine" that reinforces existing social hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). In India and other developing nations, the challenge is no longer just about getting children through the school gate. The contemporary crisis is twofold: achieving universal enrolment while simultaneously dismantling the deep-seated structural and cultural inequalities that prevent children in informal settlements from achieving meaningful learning outcomes. In these settings, the "hidden curriculum" of the educational institutes mostly alienates those who do not have the middle-class cultural capital required to be succeed.

The Indian Context: Post-RTE Challenges in Urban Centres

By declaring education as a basic right for the children of age group between 6 to 14 years, the RTE (Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education) act of 2009 made the things quite better in India. Nation is able to get millions of first-generation learners into the classroom. The majority of Indian goes to primary school, at least on paper. Dreze and Sen (2013) believe that a persisting quality gap represents the fundamental hurdle to establishing real educational equity. Being in a classroom doesn't mean a youngster is learning. The education system is severely split in megacities like Delhi. This shows how

divided the city is socially and economically. The capital includes top private schools and high-tech "Model" government schools, but for students in the slums of North-West Delhi, school is often a matter of "educational triage." These kids go to schools that don't have enough money, where the facilities are breaking apart, and the way they educate isn't relevant to what the students do every day. They have "socio-educational" problems that are hard to fix since they arise from familial issues, like not having adequate space to study and parents who can't read. These problems get worse when institutions are engaged. The government builds the things that are needed, but it doesn't provide the child the decent education they need to make up for what they don't have.

Global Frameworks and the Evolution of Educational Rights

People have understood for a long time that education gives folks on the margins a real shot at escaping poverty. This idea took off back in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That's where Article 26 spelled it out education isn't just a bonus; it's a basic human right. The legal landscape shifted from "welfare" to "rights" with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989). By placing civil and cultural rights on equal footing with social rights, the CRC ensured that a child's right to learn was protected regardless of their socio-economic background.

A pivotal turning point occurred at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien. This gathering moved the global conversation beyond mere school attendance toward the concept of "basic learning needs" (UNESCO, 1990). As the focus expanded, the importance of the psychological environment became clear. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2007) introduced guidelines for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), arguing that for education to be effective in high-stress urban environments, it must be both safe and culturally relevant.

Also, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE, 2005) developed a "Minimum Standards" framework to safeguard learning during crises. These standards centre around five main pillars: building solid policies and involving communities, making sure students have a safe place to learn, keeping the quality of teaching high, supporting teachers and staff, and holding institutions accountable for education policies. Groups like the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2010) and the Incheon Declaration (2015) pushed these rights even further. The Incheon Declaration, in particular, got people unified around Sustainable Development Goal -4 making sure everyone gets access to inclusive, fair, and lifelong learning by 2030 (World Education Forum, 2015).

The Indian Legislative Landscape: From Policy to Protection

India didn't just sit back and let things happen when it came to children and their education. The court system actually got serious about making sure children receive a fair shot, which is pretty much what you see in other areas throughout the world. When the government formed up the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2006, it wasn't just another bureaucratic shift. For the first time, kids' issues arrived right at the core of government agendas. It stopped being something people dealt with on the side today, children's needs gained genuine attention and started shaping wider initiatives.

But honestly, the real breakthrough occurred with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in 2009. That's when everything truly started to alter. This law, predicated on Article 21-A of the Constitution, says every kid has a right to free elementary education in their area. For families living in locations like Mangolpuri's resettlement colonies, this is huge. The guarantee of a local school might be the one thing that protects their children from being locked out of the education system totally.

To keep things going, the government set out the Samagra Shiksha Programme in 2018. It doesn't just consider education as lesson after lesson, it treats it as a comprehensive journey, starting with preschool and going all the way up to senior secondary. Its major goals is to boost quality so children actually learn, reducing disparities between social groups and genders, and making sure marginalized kids don't simply get in the door, they're fully involved.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has been keeping a check on these laws and investigating when kids' rights become infringed since 2007. Honestly, kids can't learn if they're living in dread. That's the whole purpose of the National School Safety Policy from 2016 it specifies out exactly how schools should safeguard students from all kinds of threats, whether it's something in the environment or something caused by humans. The goal? Make schools a place where kids truly feel safe, so they have a true shot at learning and thriving.

The Evolution of Mangolpuri

To fully comprehend the distinctive educational growth of children in Mangolpuri, one must go above the conventional label of "slum" and examine the unique historical and political evolution of this location. Unlike spontaneous jhuggi-jhopri (JJ) clusters that arise organically near workplaces, Mangolpuri is a "resettlement colony" formed mostly during the mid-1970s. It was a product of state-led urban "beautification" schemes, when the disadvantaged were forcibly evacuated from central Delhi and resettled to the city's peripheral regions.

Sociologically, the relocation from a central city slum to a periphery resettlement colony is a double-edged sword. While it affords a degree of "tenure security" and more permanent brick-and-mortar housing, it sometimes leads to in what Desai (2012) describes the "spatial trapping" of the poor. Mangolpuri represents a site where historical marginality has become institutionalised over decades. For children growing up here today, the environment is defined by high population density, economic precarity, and a distinct lack of "bridging social capital" the connections to people outside their immediate social circle who could provide opportunities. Education in Mangolpuri is not a straightforward process of attending school; it is a complex act of navigating a neighborhood that lacks the "ecology of support" found in middle-class urban areas. Here, the street often becomes the primary site of socialisation, and the school is frequently viewed with skepticism or as a secondary priority to immediate economic survival. The challenge for these children is not just academic; it is the struggle to maintain educational aspirations within a spatial context that consistently signals their marginality to the rest of the city.

Literature Review

The Sociology of Urban Marginality and Territorial Stigma

If you look at places like Mangolpuri, resettlement colonies really show what “Advanced Marginality” means in real life. Wacquant (2008) talks about it as this mix of poverty and neighborhood stigma; basically, people get judged just for where they live, and that bad reputation sticks to them, making it harder to get ahead. In India, Bhan (2016) says “resettlement” acts almost like the government’s planned version of informality you get a home, but not the social or economic basics you actually need to be part of city life. So, you end up isolated. It’s like a poverty trap. Young people live right next to all kinds of urban opportunities, but everyone treats their colony as “other,” so they’re blocked, socially and economically, from reaching any of them (Dupont 2011).

Cultural Capital and the "Pedagogic Gap"

A significant body of literature explores why school enrollment does not naturally lead to social mobility for the urban poor. Bourdieu (1986) identifies "Cultural Capital" as the collection of symbolic elements skills, tastes, and linguistic habits that one acquires through their social class. Reay (2004) argues that the formal school system implicitly rewards the cultural capital of the middle class, leaving children from areas like Mangolpuri at a systematic disadvantage.

Also, the instability of the domestic environment in these clusters is a primary determinant of educational outcomes. This issue of "everyday precariousness" is not exclusive to metropolitan places. As Sharma and Sharma (2025) reveal in their qualitative analysis of families in struggling border regions, external systemic pressures deeply enter "everyday social life," disturbing the constant parental support and stability essential for a child's scholastic performance. In Mangolpuri, a similar penetration happens when the structural violence of poverty replicates the instability of a frontier, producing a precarious setting for learning.

The Gendered Dimensions of Urban Education

Gendered challanges in urban areas are a common issue in contemporary studies. While the gender gap in primary enrollment has narrowed, the dropout rate for adolescent girls in resettlement colonies remains high. Rao (2018) identifies a "protection-versus-education" paradox: in congested and often insecure urban environments, parents frequently restrict the mobility of girls due to safety concerns, which directly impacts their regular school attendance. Conversely, for boys, Jeffrey (2010) identifies the state of "Timepass" a feeling of frustration where marginalized youth realize that their educational credentials may not lead to formal employment, leading to a gradual disengagement from the schooling process in favour of immediate, informal labour.

The Quality Crisis and the Private-Public Divide

The study points out that "low-cost private schooling" is on the rise in urban slums, mostly because people aren't satisfied with the public education system. Tooley and Dixon (2007) argue that parents in places like Mangolpuri often send their kids to unregulated private schools, believing they're better than official schools. Juneja (2014) disagrees, saying these private schools usually lack skilled staff and only offer an appearance of quality. The market ends up fragmented. The poorest students stay stuck in underfunded public schools, while families with a bit more money spend a lot of their income on private schools that only improve academic performance slightly.

Environmental Stressors and Cognitive Development

There's a clear connection between living conditions in slums and how kids do in school. The Public Health Foundation of India looked at North-West Delhi's crowded neighbourhoods in 2019 and found that children there struggle more with chronic malnutrition and respiratory problems. Bad sanitation and polluted air are to blame. Because of these issues, kids miss school more often and have trouble concentrating when they're actually in class. Das and Hammer (2007) dive deeper, describing this as the

"biology of poverty." When poor nutrition meets constant environmental stress, it forms a real, physiological roadblock to learning. Standard teaching methods simply can't break through that barrier.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study was based on a qualitative approach to explore the socio-educational issues faced by children in the Mangolpuri resettlement colony. The reason for choosing this approach was its potential to explore children lived experiences and social realities that often go unnoticed under quantitative measures. The study was exploratory and descriptive in nature.

Focused Area

This study was conducted in Mangolpuri, a prominent resettlement colony located in North-West Delhi. It was purposively selected because of its distinct socio-historical background as an urban site for displaced populations and its typical housing conditions, where high-density housing is a common feature in this area, i.e., plots of 12.5 square yards and 25 square yards.

Sampling

The universe of the study includes school-age children and their resident families within Mangolpuri.

Sampling Technique: The researcher utilized Purposive Sampling to select households actively engaged with the local government schooling system. Also, Snowball Sampling was employed to identify "at-risk" students and those who have discontinued their formal education, ensuring the inclusion of voices often missing from institutional records.

Sample Size (N=43): The final sample consists of a focused group of primary participants:

- **35 Children (Aged 10–16)**: This cohort represents the core of the study, providing data on school engagement, peer dynamics, and the "space-study" conflict.
- **8 Parents/Guardians**: These participants provide the necessary household context, discussing economic precarity, domestic pressures, and their aspirations for their children's future.

Techniques for Data Collection

To ensure the validity and depth of the findings, the study employed a triangulation of qualitative tools:

- **Semi-Structured Interview Schedules**: One-on-one sessions were conducted with all 43 participants. The open-ended nature of these interviews allowed participants to describe their "noisescapes," the financial burden of "shadow education" (tuitions), and personal aspirations in their own words.
- **Field Observation**: The researcher maintained a field diary to document the physical infrastructure of the colony. This included observing the lack of quiet communal spaces, the density of the living quarters, and the "safety perceptions" of the narrow lanes during different times of the day.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**: Small group interactions were facilitated with the children to identify shared perceptions regarding teacher-student gaps and the perceived utility of formal education in the informal economy.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected through interviews and field notes was analyzed using Thematic Analysis. The process followed a systematic three-stage protocol:

1. **Coding**: Breaking down raw qualitative data into manageable labels (e.g., "spatial conflict," "safety curfew," "tuition debt").
2. **Categorization**: Grouping these codes into the four operational themes identified in the findings: Physical/Spatial, Economic, Gendered, and Institutional.
3. **Cross-Case Synthesis**: Comparing the responses of the children against those of the parents to identify "Perception Gaps," particularly regarding the safety of the colony and the quality of local government schools.

Results

The findings of this study reveal that educational challenges in Mangolpuri are not merely a result of individual academic ability but are deeply embedded in the socio-spatial architecture of the resettlement colony.

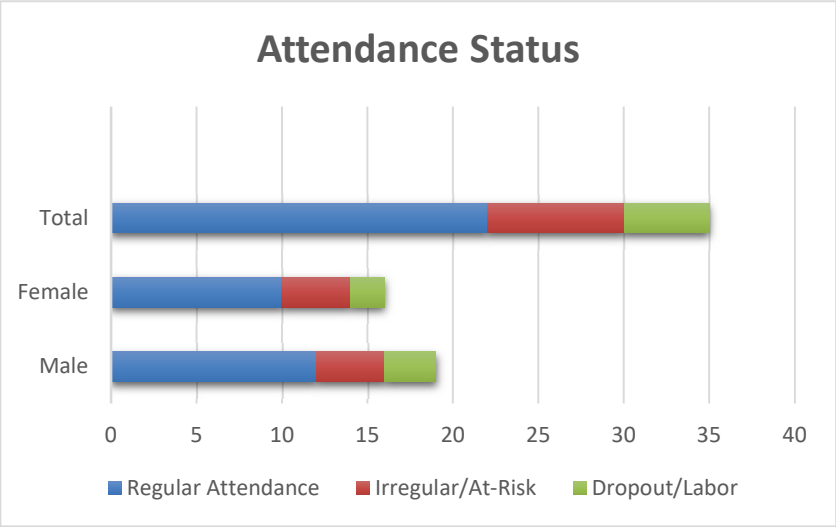

Figure 1 ***Educational Engagement Status of Participants by Gender (n=35)***

The majority of the child participants (62.8%) maintain regular school attendance. However, a significant portion (22.8%) is classified as 'Irregular' or 'At-Risk,' frequently balancing school with household or external labour. When disaggregated by gender, the data shows that male participants are slightly more represented in the 'Dropout/Labour' category (n=3) compared to females (n=2). This quantitative baseline supports the qualitative findings regarding the 'Timepass' culture among marginalized male youth and the gendered entry into the informal urban economy."

Theme I: The "Spatial Conflict" and the Noisescape of Marginality

The most pervasive theme among the **35 children** was the struggle for physical and mental "study space." In the 12.5 sq. yard plots of Mangolpuri, the home is a multifunctional site where sleeping, cooking, and socializing happen in a single room.

Narrative: The Midnight Learner *"There is no 'desk' in my house. My books stay on the shelf until everyone is asleep. If I open them at 7:00 PM, my mother is cooking and the smoke makes my eyes water, or my brother is playing music. I have started waking up early morning because that is the only time Mangolpuri is quiet. My teacher asks why I look tired in class... how do I tell her I am a night-watchman for my own education?"* - Respondent C14 (Male, 15 years)**.** This highlights **"Spatial Inequality."** While the Right to Education mandates a seat in a school, it does not account for the lack of a seat at home. The "Noisescape" of the colony acts as a persistent cognitive barrier.

Theme II: The "Coaching Trap" and the Financialization of Hope

A significant finding from the 8 parent interviews was the belief that government schooling is a "hollow shell" that requires private supplementation.

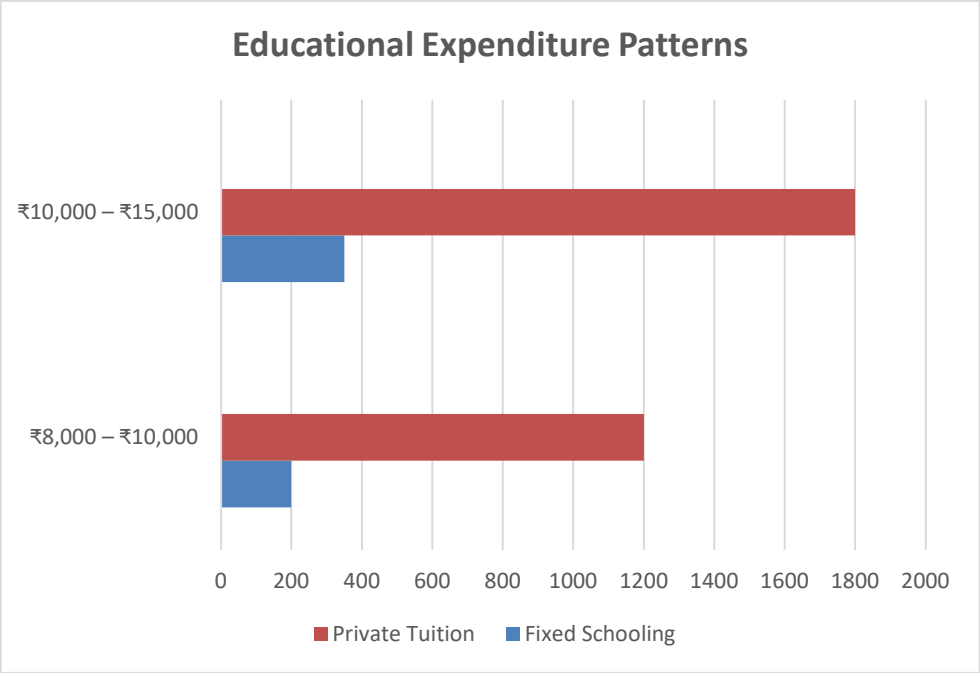

Figure 2: Household Income vs. Education Expenditure

Most families in Mangolpuri spend more on private coaching—what they call "Shadow Education"—than any other recurring educational cost. For a lot of them, it eats up over 15% of their total income, and that's not a small sum.

One mother puts it like this: *"The government says school is free, but nothing is free. At the government school, the master just gives homework. He doesn't explain things. If I don't send my daughter to Bhaiya in Block-N for tuition, she'll fail her boards. The 600 rupees a month for tuition—it's tough."*

Theme III: Gendered Mobility and the "Safety Curfew"

For the 16 girls in the study, just being enrolled in school isn't enough. Their access to education always depends on how safe their parents feel it is for them to move around outside. Parents set up an unspoken "safety curfew" that lets their daughters leave the house only when it's light out. Basically, once it gets dark, the girls lose their chance to go for extra classes, use the library, or learn new skills.

The "Protectionist" Barrier

Most parents—seven out of eight—say the neighborhood atmosphere is the main reason. They're just not comfortable letting their daughters stay out after sunset. This invisible rule means girls have to skip

computer lab sessions, tuition classes, or group studies that run past 5 pm. *"I want to stay for the computer lab, but my father says the atmosphere at the bus stand isn't good after 5. My brother stays out till 9, but for me, school ends right at the bell. My education is shorter than his, just because of the streets I have to walk through."* (Respondent C28, Female, 14 years).

Theme IV: Institutional Alienation and the "Class Bias"

It's also clear that a lot of students feel out of place at school. More than half 51% talk about being "othered" by teachers who don't live in the area and see Mangolpuri kids as limited before they even start. This feeling quietly shapes the classroom, making it somewhere students feel judged by where they're from.

Mapping Teacher-Student Perceptions

Teachers often chalk up children's struggles to family problems, not bigger issues like long travel or not enough food. They see students as needing more hand-holding. Kids notice this distance; the lessons might be by the book, but the connection just isn't there.

Erosion of the Pedagogic Bond

Over time, this gap eats away at trust. Kids feel like no matter what they do, they're still seen as "from the colony." When that sense creeps in, they start missing school more. It's a spiral that pushes them out of the system, especially when resources are already tight. If schools want to fix this, they need teachers who actually know the community and can build real connections.

Discussion

The main themes in Mangolpuri like gendered safety curfews, class bias in institutions, poverty that locks families into certain areas, and weak teacher-student connections line up well with a lot of well-known theories. Wacquant's idea of territorial stigmatization really comes through in children's stories. They talk about how being from "that neighborhood" shapes how teachers and peers see them, so even with supposed access under the RTE, they're still constantly on the back foot. There's also Bourdieu's cultural capital gap at play: teachers often carry deficit attitudes rooted in their own middle-class backgrounds, which just pushes the kids further out. This echoes how Reay found working-class students sidelined in schools.

Gender is a big deal here, too. Restrictions on girls' movements not just whether they're allowed out at night, but exactly when fit Rao's "protection-versus-education" dilemma, but it's even more intense. After 5 PM, there's a community curfew "for safety," which means girls miss out on any sort of extra classes or study groups. This isn't a detail urban research usually grabs: it means that parental worries, while understandable in a risky setting, double down on cutting girls off from opportunity earlier than boys. It reinforces what Jeffrey noticed with "Timepass" and explains why dropout rates spike for girls.

These findings push urban education theory further. Moving families to Mangolpuri was supposed to help them climb the social ladder, but the way the neighborhood is planned actually deepens their marginalization—exactly what Bhan warned about. Unlike older, informal slums where people built up helpful networks, Mangolpuri's layout breaks those ties. Kids end up socializing mainly on the street, and those street networks pull them away from school. Poverty works on both the body and mind here, too Das and Hammer's "biology of poverty" clicks with the stress and health issues that Saplings like Samagra Shiksha just don't account for they're too focused on enrollment numbers and infrastructure while ignoring what kids actually need to stay in school.

Policy also has to move beyond just building schools or giving out books. Samagra Shiksha should fund quiet places to study, free or cheap tutoring, and practical supports, not just count how many kids show up. Plus, the NCPCR could step up by running annual "perception audits" basically asking kids, parents, and teachers what's working and what's not, so the trade-offs between opportunity and safety are actually out in the open and can get fixed.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study covers a small group (n=43) from North-West Delhi so it's tough to say these findings apply anywhere else. If we had bigger samples from different places, we could really see if these patterns hold up. We asked people about their aspirations, but you know how it goes sometimes folks just say what sounds good. We tried to balance this with other kinds of data, but still, it's something to keep in mind. Tracking this group over time, checking how they do after the intervention, and looking at hard numbers on their progress would make our conclusions stronger. Plus, comparing their experience with places where resettlement actually works could help pinpoint what protects people from these ongoing challenges.

Conclusion

This study digs into the daily struggles that children face in Mangolpuri's resettlement colony, showing how tough it can be to get a good education even with India's Right to Education Act in place. When we listen to stories from 35 kids (10-16 years old) and 8 parents, a few patterns stand out. Girls are stuck with daylight-only freedom because of "safety curfews" once the sun goes down, their learning stops. The resettlement areas themselves are on the city's edge, which makes everything school, activities, even basic friendships harder. And parents and teachers just don't see eye to eye, which leaves the children feeling even more lost.

These stories reflect what Wacquant called "advanced marginality." Teachers act like the neighborhood's bad reputation is contagious, so they keep their distance, and you see Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital play out in real time kids who don't "fit in" get sidelined every day. The "protection versus education" conflict gets literal in Mangolpuri after 5 PM, girls aren't allowed out, Meanwhile, boys drift into "Timepass," just killing time because they feel equally left out.

Urban life here doesn't bring people together the way some rural villages do. Instead, the environment itself acts like a constant stressor, echoing the "biology of poverty." The state's resettlement plans haven't really helped break the cycle in some ways, they've made it worse. Just getting kids enrolled in school isn't enough.

What helps? The study calls for practical changes: require teachers to actually spend time in these colonies so they can see their students' lives up close and hopefully drop their biases. After-hours safe zones run by women could let girls keep learning in the evenings. Lower-cost tutoring and regular check-ins between parents, kids, and teachers would help everyone get on the same page.

While this is an early look, it raises big questions about whether India is meeting its promise of equal education for all, especially for the 65 million kids in slums. The kids in Mangolpuri have big dreams learning computers, finishing school but their reality keeps telling them they're outsiders. If schools are really supposed to open doors, they need to do more than just let children in. They need to be engines for fairness, helping to close the gaps that policy alone can't. We need to act quickly and with purpose so that enrollment isn't just a number; it's a real chance for a better life.

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