



Crystallising Marginalisation of Urban Watta Dwellers: A Study Based on Matiwatta in “Angulana”

H. L. S. De Zoysa, Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna, lszoysa96@gmail.com

A. M. A. S. Gunasekara, Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna,
suranjith@soci.ruh.ac.lk

Abstract

The global COVID-19 epidemic had an impact on every social, political, economic, and cultural area. It wasn't only a healthcare catastrophe; its ramifications were multifaceted. In Sri Lanka, urban watta (slum) inhabitants were also included. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact. They are a marginalized community. When it came to following new healthcare procedures, there were a few issues. The selected research problem was "how urban slum/watta people were marginalized while crystallizing their social exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka" this research. The major goal of this study was to determine the elements that contributed to urban watta dwellers' social marginalization and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. This study used a Case Study research design and was conducted as qualitative research. The research region was Matiwatta Slum in Angulana South Grama Niladhari Division, and data was obtained using the snowball sampling method and Purposive sampling method. For the primary data collection, twenty respondents were recruited, and in-depth interviews were done. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Even before the COVID-19 lockdown phase, urban watta inhabitants were a marginalized community, according to the research findings. New lockdown experiences, encountered social, economic, and cultural issues, the role of non-slum dwellers and political agencies, issues of adhering to new healthcare practices, and reshaping social identity were some of the identified influential factors that determined the social exclusion and marginalization of urban watta dwellers during the lockdown period. In conclusion, these causes contributed to the worsening of social exclusion and marginalization, and as a result, watta residents' marginalization and social exclusion crystallized during the COVID-19 period, as a marginalized community.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Crystallising, Marginalization, Social Exclusion, Urban, Watta Dwellers*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the transformation of all social-economic, political, and particularly healthcare aspects to a higher level. It was capable enough to change the human lifestyle, daily routing, and social behaviour. According to the pandemic situation, the global urban population was highly victimised by this disease since its close proximity to affected people increased the possibility of spreading the virus within the community. On the other hand, the referred literary facts revealed that urban slum populations were considered socially excluded and marginalised communities. Since urban slum dwellers were highly victimised during the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it was expected to study the social exclusion and marginalisation of urban watta (slum) dwellers during the pending status. In the Sri Lankan context, urban Watta dwellers were reported as having the highest number of patients in the urban sector. In addition, the identified facts from the literature review led this study to explore how urban slum/watta dwellers are marginalised while crystallising the social exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka as the problem of this research. The primary objective of this research is to identify slum/watta dwellers' re-marginalisation and crystallising their social exclusion during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Literature Review

The literature review was conducted by reviewing theories, concepts, and previous studies related to this study. Social exclusion theory was used as the theoretical framework of this research to explore the identified research problem. In addition, concepts such as slums, marginalisation, urbanisation, pandemic, disaster, social distancing, stigmatisation, labelling, and vulnerability were used in the literature review. The previous studies, theories, and concepts were contributed to determine the research gap and provide the literary background for this research.

UN HABITAT (2003) explained that slum areas have high concentrations of poverty and social and economic deprivation, including broken families, unemployment, financial, physical, and social exclusion. In addition, slums develop because of a combination of factors, including rapid rural to urban migration, increasing urban poverty and inequality, marginalisation of poor neighbourhoods, the inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for housing, insufficient investment in new low-income housing, and poor maintenance of the existing housing stock.

Subasinghe (2015) explained that urban slum dwellers in Sri Lanka were recognised as a marginalised and socially excluded community and a specific subcultural group. Poverty, suicide, prostitution, alcoholism, malnutrition, child deviancy, and child abuse were the most prevalent social problems which were identified within the slums in Sri Lanka. This research explained that urban slum dwellers were practising specific cultural norms and values. Besides, the researcher explored the well-known fact that poverty was the prime

characteristic of the slum. The poor, including slum dwellers, had always been forced to live in the city's worst housing.

Adhikari et al. (2020) explain that urban areas are highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, there is growing evidence of disparities by race or ethnicity across neighbourhoods; furthermore, neighbourhood poverty causes vulnerability during COVID-19.

Corburn et al. (2020) describe, "The informal settlements of the Global South are the least prepared for the pandemic of COVID-19 since basic needs such as water, toilets, sewers, drainage, waste collection, and secure and adequate housing are already in short supply or non-existent. Further, space constraints, violence, and overcrowding in slums make physical distancing and self-quarantine impractical, and the rapid spread of an infection highly likely."

Chen and Chen (2020) explain that rural residents were less likely to perform preventive behaviours and were more likely to have a negative attitude toward preventive behaviours than urban residents.

Pineda and Corburn (2020) identify that disabled people who live in urban areas are more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. They are four times more likely to be injured or die than non-disabled people. Urban health policy, planning, and practice have not considered their needs, and therefore, these people become more vulnerable than their disabilities. Furthermore, they are subjected to discrimination and stigma as well. Policy implications such as social isolation, locking down areas, physical barriers on the streets, and transportation make it extremely difficult for disabled people to survive in urban areas during the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

According to Tampe (2020), urban slum dwellers are the most affected community during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to other urban residents. Especially the low and middle-income countries faced this challenge. Tampe describes that prevention efforts such as hand washing, self-isolation, and physical distancing are not feasible due to physical, structural and social aspects of slum environments. The proximity of housing within slums, many family members occupying small spaces, and shared restrooms among several households highly caused outbreaks in such communities.

Kaushal and Mahajan (2021) explained that as the world largest slum, the Dharavi slum in Mumbai, India severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 29th July 2020, around 120,000 total cases were reported in Mumbai. They explained that as COVID-19 infection is highly susceptible to densely populated areas such as slums and informal settlements in cities, the situation becomes worse when these slums emerged as hotspots of Coronavirus. However, they explained that implementing the 4Ts model (Tracing, Tracking, Testing and treating proactive patients) reduces COVID-19 cases and suggests this model as a practical policy implementation for governmental policymaker's private agencies.

Silva (2020) explained that social media highly impacted social stigma, prejudice, and labelling during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. As a result, the disadvantaged

communities such as religious and ethnic minorities, poor urban communities were severely vulnerable during the pandemic situation. Furthermore, he emphasised the importance of ensuring the rights, dignity and needs of affected people.

Sevelius et al. (2020) described that marginalised communities were highly likely to be marginalised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those marginalised communities were excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational and cultural spheres. Due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, there can be seen a continuity of this marginalisation, and therefore, the marginalised communities in the pre-COVID-19 period were highly likely to be marginalised in the COVID-19 situation as well

Materials and Methods

This research is qualitative. Subjectivism was the epistemological background of the research and interpretivism was used as the theoretical perspective in research methodology. This research was conducted by the single Holistic case study Research Design. Matiwatta slum in Angulana South Grama Niladhari Division (547A) which was selected as the geographic area of this research. This research was conducted by the purposive sampling method to determine the critical informant of this research. The snowball sampling method was used to find out the other respondents of this research. Besides, 20 respondents were selected for the data collection. In-depth interviews were used for the primary data collection, and secondary data was also used for this research as well. The thematic analysis method was used as the data analysis method. It provided the necessary facilities to analyse the collected data—in-depth interviews data analysed by thematic analysis method. Therefore, research findings were described under the thematic analysis method, and the themes were selected according to Brann and Clarke (2006), 1. They were familiarised with the data, 2. They were generating initial codes, 3 and searching for themes, 4. Revealing potential teams and 5. Defining and naming themes. Furthermore, this research identified eight significant themes using Brann and Clarke's thematic analysis model. 1. Experiences of Watta dwellers marginalisation in Pre Covid-19 Era, 2. COVID-19 experiences of urban watta dwellers, 3. Socioeconomic and Cultural Issues Encountered by Urban Watta Dwellers, 4. Urban Watta dwellers' Reflections on discrimination during lockdown period, 5. Role of non-slum dwellers during COVID-19 pandemic, 6. Role of political leaders during the COVID-19 situation, 7. Adhering to new Healthcare practices and 8. Re-shaping Social Identity was the central theme of this research.

Results and Discussion

The collected data were analysed by the thematic analysis method. Therefore, several specific themes related to crystallising marginalisation and social exclusion of urban watta dwellers during the covid-19 period. 1. Experiences of Watta dwellers marginalisation in Pre Covid-19 Era, 2. COVID-19 experiences of urban watta dwellers, 3. Socioeconomic and Cultural Issues Encountered by Urban Watta Dwellers, 4. Urban Watta dwellers' Reflections on discrimination during lockdown period, 5. Role of non-slum dwellers during COVID-19 pandemic, 6. Role of political leaders during the COVID-19 situation, 7. Adhering new Healthcare practices and 8. Re-shaping Social Identity was the central theme of this research.

Under the theme, “Experiences of Watta dwellers marginalisation in Pre Covid-19 Era,” identified four sub-themes: seeking jobs, dealing with non-slum dwellers, dealing with politicians, and exclusion within the educational institutions. These themes explained how urban watta dwellers were marginalised even before the COVID-19 pandemic period. Furthermore, the theme "COVID-19 experiences of urban watta dwellers" is described under sub-themes such as experiences of staying at home, experiences within the peer slum community, experiences with non-slum dwellers, experiences within the religious community and experiences with the mass media.

According to collected data, urban watta dwellers were excluded and marginalised even before the impact of covid-19. This community was discriminated against, marginalized, and excluded when seeking jobs and dealing with non-slum dwellers and politicians before the COVID-19 pandemic. Watta dwellers faced several social, economic, and cultural issues and these issues also emphasised social exclusion and marginalisation. This research explains the reflections of urban watta dwellers regarding social exclusion and marginalisation, non-slum dwellers' roles, and the role of political agencies in excluding this community. It describes that adhering to new health care practices was also an ideal situation for social exclusion. Finally, it states that this community had to divert their social identity, which affected social exclusion.

Experiences of Watta Dwellers Marginalisation in Pre Covid-19 Era

UN HABITAT (2003) explained that slum areas have high concentrations of poverty and social and economic deprivation, including broken families, unemployment, and financial, physical, and social exclusion. In addition, slums develop due to rural-to-urban migration, increasing urban poverty and inequality, marginalisation of poor neighbourhoods, the inability of the urban poor to access affordable land for housing, insufficient investment in new low-income housing, and inadequate housing maintenance of the existing housing stock. Similarly, the watta dwellers in the Angulana area experienced marginalisation in several cases even before the COVID-19 pandemic period. They described that they felt like a disadvantaged community when they encountered several incidents in their lifetime, such as seeking jobs, dealing with political leaders within the educational sector, and dealing with non-slum dwellers. Such kinds of adventures can be explained as follows.

Seeking Jobs

The respondents of this research described that they felt that they were discriminated against when seeking jobs and facing interviews. In some cases, according to their narration, it was identified that they also had some prejudices and stereotypes when they sought occupations. The following response depicted this scenario, vice versa.

“We should know our limits. There are jobs that we could do and couldn't. Now we have some jobs. It is perfect that now we have these jobs we can do ourselves according to our education. I learned only up to grade three. So we can do only jobs like housemaids, cleaning services. But my daughter already passed GCE Advance Levels, but she still couldn't find a suitable job. Finally, she had to work in a garment

factory with her classmates who only completed GCE Ordinary Levels. However, though we have sound qualifications, they do not give proper jobs for people like us who live in huts/ slums."

(Respondent 11_45 Years_Married_Housemaid_In-depth Interviews)

On the other hand, the non-slum dwellers perceived that the watta dwellers ascribed the blue-collar (daily paid jobs) they were currently engaged in and perceived that watta dwellers do not deserve white-collar jobs already involved.

"The fact is Son, the people who live in slums don't have a good education. So they don't know how to behave in society. So how we can allow them to come to our social level. But, on the other hand, it is fair that all the people are doing those kinds of small income jobs; otherwise, there will not be anyone to pluck coconuts, repair something or clean our houses anymore."

(Respondent 18_55 Years_Married_Government Executive Officer In-Depth Interviews)

According to above mentioned two above statements, it was identified that urban watta dwellers had internal reflections that they do not deserve white-collar jobs due to their lack of education level. Still, they knew that their children should not deserve parents' occupations if they have proper qualifications for so-called "better jobs". Meanwhile, the non-slum dwellers believed that the watta dwellers should not deserve careers that were considered "better jobs". They also had a prejudice that all the watta dwellers have a lack of education minimum qualifications. Therefore, they ascribed to do blue-collar jobs only.

Moreover, slum-dwellers have limited access to credit and traditional job markets due to stigmatisation, discrimination and geographic isolation (UN HABITAT, 2003). Therefore, it was identified that urban watta dwellers already adopted to discrimination and were excluded by their inner thoughts and ideologies. On the other hand, non-slum dwellers excluded them as a marginalised community who should deserve a lack of opportunities.

Dealing with Non Slum Dwellers

The watta dwellers perceived that they were highly likely to be labelled among the non-slum dwellers. They explained that non-slum dwellers used slang to address them.

Once a respondent stated that,

"We know that people are talking about us by different names. Even though people do not tell our faces, people call us as watta people, Mudukku people, Mudukkukarayo, koreawe minissu ('Slum people, shanties' people, Korean people). Normally when a woman is too talkative and has bad words, people call her "talking like a Mudukku woman'."

(Respondent 10_45 Years_Married_Housewife_In depth Interviews)

According to those kinds of statements, urban watta dwellers in Angulana internalised the fact that they were already recognised as a specific, different, and labelled community within society compared with the recognition received by non-slum dwellers. This is another situation faced by urban watta dwellers being socially excluded and marginalised before COVID-19.

Dealing with Politicians

Watta dwellers had the ideology that they were highly discriminated against by political leaders in that area. They described themselves as puppets during the election. politicians only help the people who supported their campaigns in the elections, but sometimes they do not get any assistance after the elections. They believed that politicians only used them during elections. Furthermore, they explained that they felt neglected and discriminated against as a community, and that politicians only wanted them in times of need. These kinds of explanations also illustrated that the urban slum dwellers were treated as a marginalised community. For example, once the respondent described that,

“All the politicians remember us only in election times. They know that without our support, they cannot do campaigns. We also support them whole hearted with the thought of “they will support us someday”. But after the election most of the politicians don’t remember us. Most of the times politicians support back to people who did campaigns for them. Sometimes it doesn’t happen even. When some people go to meet politicians on ‘Public Day’, politicians don’t even like when we come to meet them in their offices. Although they need us during election days, after the election they ignored them as a penny.”

(Respondent 09_51 Years_Married_Labourer_In depth Interviews)

Subasinghe (2015), explained that urban slum dwellers and politicians in Sri Lanka have a close relationship, and they have close personal relationships as well. Visiting the funerals, weddings, parties, and other community events are frequent occurrences. However, the urban slum dwellers highly expect that politicians should interfere in their personal matters since they help them with elections, campaigns, etc. This kind of situation was exemplified by urban watta dwellers in the above-mentioned statement. . However, this study identified that urban watta dwellers perceived that they were subjected to discrimination by politicians, even though they helped them wholeheartedly during elections. This was another illustration which showed that urban watta dwellers are highly likely to be discriminated against, marginalized, and socially excluded by the role of politicians.

Exclusion within the Educational Institutions

Most of the dwellers in this slum go to the same government school, and the respondents explained that they do not face many problems within the school because all the children go to one school. However, respondents explained that 90% of the students finish their school life after the ordinary level exam. It’s a very rare situation when a student goes to advanced

level classes. The respondents said that the school teachers do not pay much attention to the students since they already know that students will end their school life after grade 11.

“The children of these slums go school up to G.C.E Ordinary Level. Afterwards most of them leave school for work. Few of them are doing the Advance Level. Even the teachers don’t care about the students. The few school teachers, stay for one or two years. After that they make transfers and leave.”

(Respondent 08_30 Years_Married_Housewife_In depth Interviews)

In addition, respondents said that their children are highly likely to be discriminated within the private tuition classes. Most tutors do not like to give individual classes, and even within group or mass classes, students are neglected and they receive less attention as well. Once a student explained

“I don’t like to go to tuition classes. When we go tuition classes, the teachers think that we are coming classes to loitering and we spoil other students. Sometimes they don’t check our homework. They scold us and humiliate us in front of other students remembering tuition fees. So I don’t like to go to tuition classes.”

(Respondent 07_15 Years_Student_In depth Interviews)

Subasinghe (2015), explained that Sri Lanka has a free education system and free primary, secondary, and tertiary education is a huge opportunity for disadvantaged communities such as urban slum dwellers. Due to this free education system it cannot be identified any social exclusion in terms of having education equally. However, this study identified that even though slum dwellers received free education, it was not equal anymore. The abovementioned two reflective examples of urban watta dwellers implied that the government school teachers are also excluding the children in watta areas, and even within the private tuition classes these children tend to be discriminated against. Therefore, it can be seen that this community is highly likely to be discriminated against not only in governmental education institutes but also in private education institutes as well. This was another depiction that pictured the social exclusion and marginalization encountered by urban watta dwellers before the COVID-19 period.

According to these examples, it can be identified that urban slum dwellers are highly likely to be discriminated against on several occasions, such as when seeking jobs, dealing with political leaders, within the educational sector, and dealing with non-slum dwellers, and this fact can be described as the fact that the urban slum dwellers were considered marginalized even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Experiences of Urban Watta Dwellers

The urban 'watta dwellers' explained some facts about their COVID-19 experiences. These facts showed that urban slum dwellers were marginalised during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. They described several incidents regarding marginalisation. Those experiences can be categorised as experiences of staying at home, experiences within the peer slum

community, experiences within the religious community, experiences within the non-slum dwellers, and experiences with the mass media during the lockdown. Those experiences which were related to marginalisation can be described as follows:

Human experiences of discrimination and stigmatisation lead them to be marginalised in that community (FRA,2010). The COVID-19 experiences of urban watta dwellers highly depicted their exclusion and re-marginalised during the pandemic. As an excluded community, their COVID-19 experiences were somewhat different from others. Nyandera (2010) explained that curfews, lockdowns, and working from home had overlooked the fate of slum dwellers. Whoever stayed behind choose between life and livelihood. Therefore, it is essential to understand the COVID-19 experiences of watta dwellers to have a comprehensive idea about their social exclusion and marginalisation.

Experiences of Staying at Home

With the severe expansion of the pandemic situation, the authorities were concerned and paid attention to introducing new social rules and regulations to minimise the spread of the virus in society. As these rules—staying home and lockdown—were introduced by the responsible parties, they forced people to follow the new rules strictly. Staying at home and being on lockdown are new experiences for not only non-slum dwellers but also slum dwellers. They experienced this unique situation with several challenges, and they explained that staying at home is an eternally difficult task. The following statement depicts that situation:

"We are not used to being stuck at home. Always we do work outside, and we walk here and there to do our daily wage duties. We have been practised to walk here and there and share every life, including sad, joyful moments with the gang. Those days we didn't have any idea about time has passed. Because, we used to work according to train time table. Even we get up at train's time. It was challenging during the lockdown as during lockdown; there was no train service. And since our childhood, we used to play cricket, carom, and play cards with the gang. Although we get married, that habit was not changed. But the effect of the lockdown period for Covid-19, we all had to be isolated. It is complicated to be inside the home as we haven't used to it."

(Respondent 06_45 Years_Married_Labourer_In depth Interviews)

This statement illustrated that the watta dwellers' daily routines were diverted, affecting their lives due to the lockdown. According to Baah et al. (2019), marginalisation is particularly problematic in conditions requiring lifestyle change. Since the watta dweller's lifestyle changed due to the pandemic situation, the experience mentioned above can be illustrated as a situation that led to a change in the watta dwellers' lifestyle and daily routine and impacted their marginalisation.

Furthermore, Lassiter et al. (2018) described that the lifestyle and cultural changes of the members who belong to subcultures are highly likely to be marginalised and socially excluded as well—the above example illustrated that urban watta dwellers enjoyed some

subcultural practices continuously, such as playing games in the evening, chatting with neighbours, etc. However, COVID-19 policy implementations such as lockdown and curfew restrictions paved the way for the temporary vanishing of those subcultural practices. Therefore, it could be identified that those restrictions for the subcultural courses tend to discriminate, exclude and marginalise the urban watta dwellers. Since the watta dwellers were known as a marginalised community, these situations affect their lives and make their marginalisation worse.

Experiences within the Peer Slum Community

The urban watta dwellers' experiences within their peer communities (other slum areas) were also important to understand in order to have a comprehension of their social exclusion and marginalization.

According to the statements provided by the respondents, these communities had some good relationships with other slum areas such as Moadarawatta, Kurusawatta, and Sayurupura, etc. before COVID-19 pandemic. However, after the lockdown in this area, those social connections collapsed, and they experienced some other issues as well. For example, one respondent explained,

“During the second lockdown period, although our area was isolated some of the near areas didn't isolate. So the people of that areas started telling that we got Covid-19 positive and don't come to their areas. They prohibited us to go near their houses. Even after the lockdown they didn't let our young people to go to their areas.”

(Respondent 15_42 Years_Married_Security Officer_In depth Interviews)

Kagon and Burton (2005) explained that social changes affect marginalization and in addition, Silva (2006) described that exclusion occurred due to moral and cultural changes under the solidarity paradigm in the social exclusion explanation. Similarly, the situation occurred in the subcultural unit, where the people faced a severe pandemic situation and their morality and ideologies towards the respondents changed. Therefore, they tend to exclude and marginalize their community in this pandemic situation.

Experience with Non-slum Dwellers

The urban slum dwellers faced some experiences related to exclusion and marginalization within the non-slum dwellers as well. Their perception was that they were excluded and neglected after the COVID-19, period and they explained that even though some people were mistreated in a slum community, there were some non-slum dwellers who dealt with them closely. But they had also been changed, and they continued to neglect them after lifting the lockdown. The example below illustrates that situation.

“Some ladies refused to give us anything as charity. Earlier they were in a friendly manner. Before lockdown, they were used to give some donations. When we passed by their gates, they called us and gave something. One day I happened to pass one

of these houses. The lady of that house, ran inside to the house and quickly locked her door."

(Respondent 06_45 Years_Married_Labourer_In depth Interviews)

As per this example, it was identified that the urban watta dwellers were marginalized when dealing with non-slum dwellers after lifting the lockdown due to the reactions of the non-slum dwellers who were close to this community.

Experiences within the Religious Community

The urban watta dwellers in Angulana explained some incidents related to their experiences with the religious community during the COVID-19 lockdown situation. According to their explanation as daily earners, they were utterly helpless during the lockdown because of their zero income. As a result, they sought assistance from a nearby religious institution (a nearby temple), but neither verbal nor physical assistance was received. For example, one respondent explained that,

"Our chief incumbent in the temple said, "There is no charity for you, go away, you slum people have children every year like ladders, now come for help, and begging foods,"

We know the funds that were received for us and distributed among the members of "Dayaka Sabha" of the temple. The monk of the temple didn't provide any help. Finally, the priest of the church who gave us immense support for our foods."

(Respondent 05_35 Years_Married_Housewife_In depth Interviews)

According to this statement, it was clear that the religious leaders always supported the "haves," even though they didn't request any help. . On the other hand, the have-nots in that society were excluded and discriminated against. According to WHO (2020), religious leaders, faith-based patience, and faith communities have a pivotal role in saving lives and reducing illnesses related to COVID-19. WHO identifies religious institutions as a primary source of support, comfort, guidance, and direct health care and social service. And on the other hand, they have a role in addressing the elimination of stigma, violence, and the incitement of hate and promoting ecumenical and interfaith collaboration and peaceful coexistence during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, according to the above statements, it was identified that the religious leaders breached those expected ethical behaviour, and they tend to promote stigma and hate speech such as "reproduce children like ladders even allowed in a slum".

On the other hand, this kind of situation leads to social exclusion and marginalisation. Therefore, it can be illustrated that Urban watta dwellers were excluded and marginalised due to the role of religious leaders in that area. But, contradictorily, they highly praised the role of the church in that. They helped them, and that situation let them change their attitudes towards other religious institutions apart from the religious institution they belonged to.

Experiences with the Mass Media

The media became the platform for spreading prejudice among people by spreading stories about the origin of the virus. Racial and socioeconomic discrimination became apparent during the quarantine. Inaccessibility to equal healthcare made the situation worse. Under such unprecedented circumstances, the media has the potential to unite people and end discrimination by spreading awareness (Anwar, 2020). However, occurred in another way within the selected urban watta area. The urban watta dwellers described several times that they were utterly helpless during lockdown due to their zero incomes, and there were several locations where they only had one meal per day. Therefore, they were waiting for someone to help them out, and then some mass media companies appeared to help them out. But according to the respondents, that situation was only a dramatic script because they did not get any help from the mass media. This situation was described by one respondent as follows.

“The media people came and distributed some donations and only among one or two houses as a show of the broadcasting. We didn’t get anything on that day.”

(Respondent 05_35 Years_ Married_ Housewife_ In depth Interviews)

Media can also be an excellent resource for information verification. However, this can only be possible through the responsible use of media where proper checks and balances are in place. This way, it can help prevent the spread of rumours and end the stigmatization of those affected by COVID-19 (Anwar, 2020).

However, the role of mass media towards urban watta dwellers were different than the explanation of Anwer (2020). The above mentioned respondent further explained,

“But when people breached the quarantine rules in our slums, the media was everywhere to televised us.”

(Respondent 05_35 Years_ Married_ Housewife_ In depth Interviews)

When the urban watta dwellers were subjected to making way for the quarantine centres, that was broadcast by mass media, and that situation implied the idea of labelling the COVID-19-affected communities by mass media. During the COVID-19 situation, the media acted unethically, and urban slum dwellers were subjected to discrimination and stigmatization. As a result, this condition aided in the marginalization and crystallization of social exclusion among Urban watta dwellers.

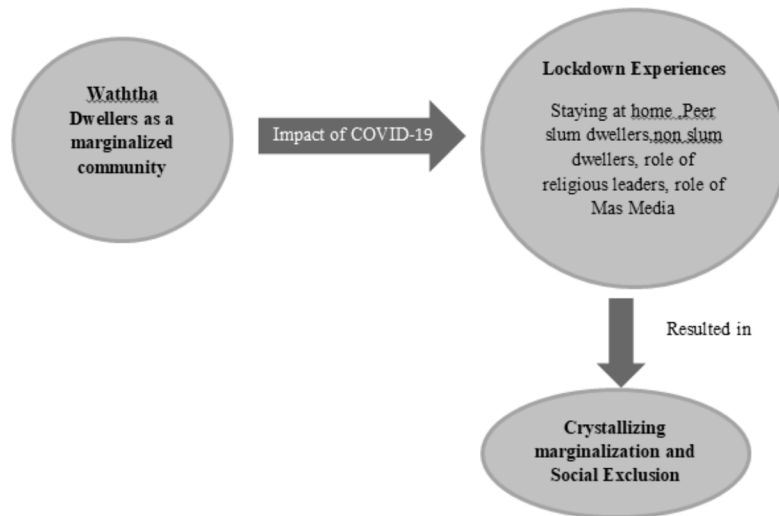


Figure 4.1 Influential Factors of lockdown experiences for Crystallizing marginalization and Social Exclusion

Urban Watta dwellers' Reflections on discrimination during lockdown period

This study explored the internal reflections of the urban watta dwellers and how they perceived social exclusion and crystallising marginalisation in terms of their experiences and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. And it was identified it is important to understand the watta dwellers' feelings, attitudes, and thoughts regarding social exclusion and marginalisation. It enriched comprehension of how the COVID-19 situation impacted urban watta dwellers' social exclusion and marginalisation.

According to the collected data, it was identified that urban watta dwellers felt that they were subjected to exclusion and social discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic situation when they had to encounter several economic, social, and cultural issues and challenges during this period. And especially when they were labelled as a community responsible for "spreading coronavirus", they were entitled, as a group from a lockdown area in the second wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, to be discriminated against when accessing some social services and even public transportation. They felt that they did not belong in the existing situation and thought they did not fit into the social structure. These kinds of emotional struggles and frustrations ultimately internalised them as a socially isolated community.

Furthermore, it was identified that they felt some aggressive thoughts when encountering several social, economic, and cultural issues.

Once a respondent explained that,

"When I feel that people are emphasising that we are from lockdown area in the second wave, and when they are constantly rejecting me in the job interviews even I am confident about my qualifications, actually I felt to slap on someone face or beat someone".

(Respondent 03_21 Years_ Unmarried_ Showroom worker_ In depth Interviews)

This statement showed that urban slum dwellers had some aggressive feelings when constantly discriminating, labelling, and excluding. The European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (2010) explained that social exclusion is both objective and subjective. People's perceptions regarding isolation, discrimination, and attitudes such as being a disadvantaged community confirm that they are an excluded community. And ultimately, it affects their mental well-being as well.

According to collected data, it was identified that this community always tends to think of "why us". Moreover, since they had to face several issues, challenges, and hurtful situations, they felt like an "utterly helpless community" and "no one is there to help them out".

The respondents explained that they were severely isolated. No one appeared to help them fulfill their needs, such as food, water, and sanitation. In addition, they explained that "we only had our people take care of us. We realised that our people only understood our vulnerability, and people could only understand the other's situation if they had encountered it previously."

According to the facts as mentioned above regarding the internal reflection of watta dwellers, it was identified that they tend to emphasise "we feeling" due to their hurtful feelings, aggression, isolation, frustration, and sadness.

Social Issues Faced by Urban Watta Dwellers during COVID-19 Period

The urban watta dwellers encountered several social issues during the lockdown. These social issues had an impact on their lives, resulting in a number of disagreements that eventually led to marginalization and social exclusion. The following are some of the social issues that have been encountered:

- Engaging in violence and aggressive behaviour with the neighbourhood watta dwellers.
- Exclusion when receiving social services.
- Discrimination in transportation.

The respondents explain that they faced some different experiences from their neighbourhood slum dwellers. They claimed to have previously formed strong bonds with neighborhood slum dwellers, but that their friendships abruptly changed after the lockdown was lifted. The neighbourhood watta dwellers, who were not subjected to lockdown in the second wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, blocked the watta dwellers in Matiwatta from entering their housing areas while saying, "*You people have coronavirus, don't even think to come this area*". Later, this dispute escalated into some violent activities between watta dwellers in Matiwatta and other neighbourhood dwellers. The root cause of this violent behaviour was labelling and excluding the subjected watta dwellers in Matiwatta. UN (n.d), explained that social inclusion and social exclusion are the two edges of the same line, and social inclusion shows some specific characteristics such as social cohesion, commonality of group members (such as belonging to similar caste, ethnicity, religion, or class). According to the above mentioned example, urban watta dwellers had social inclusion with other neighbourhood dwellers since

they shared common characteristics. However, COVID-19 enabled a single fact to turn that social inclusion upside down. Living in an area with COVID-19 positive patients, other Watta residents socially labeled, marginalized, and eventually excluded this community, despite belonging to a similar class and social strata. In addition, both of these communities were subjected to marginalization even before the COVID-19 period, but due to the social exclusion of this neighbourhood watta dwellers, watta dwellers in Matiwatta area had to be marginalized by another marginalized group.

Furthermore, urban watta dwellers were discriminated against and excluded when receiving social services as well. During the lockdown, the government provided some aid, such as distributing five thousand rupees and groceries worth around five thousand rupees. Watta dwellers, on the other hand, described seeing non-slum dwellers who were wealthier than them receive these aids before them. Therefore, they felt that they were neglected in terms of receiving social welfare, and that feeling was increased because they were starving from lack of food at that time. Social exclusion theory and marginalisation concepts describe that a lack of opportunities leads to social inequality, which results in social exclusion and marginalization (Giddens, 1998 and Kagon & Burton, 2005). Similar situations occurred among the urban watta dwellers in Matiwatta, and they encountered several neglects, mistreatments, and inequalities. This resulted in these people becoming a marginalised and socially excluded community.

The urban watta dwellers explained that they had to experience some discrimination in the public transportation services as well. One respondent said,

“When we got into bus which is going in this road, from the halt in our area people refused sat behind us and they kept standing all the way. Sometimes when our people sat next to them, they stand up and walk away from us. They didn't allow us to being closer to them.”

(Respondent 09_53 Years_Married_Cleaning Labourer_In depth Interviews)

This was also another situation which exemplified that the urban watta dwellers in equally treated and prejudice as a community which was excluded.

UN (n.d) explained specific symptoms of social exclusion as follows.

Figure 4.2 Specific Symptoms of Social Exclusion [UN (n.d)]



According to this figure, it can be identified that urban waththa dwellers encountered all these symptoms in terms of experiencing social issues during COVID-19. Denial behaviour of neighbourhood waththa dwellers, neglect in receiving social aids and discrimination in public transportation, implied the sense of unequal access to resources and unequal participation and denial of opportunities as well. Ultimately, all these factors contributed to social exclusion and the crystallization of the marginalization of urban waththa dwellers in Matiwaththa.

Cultural Issues Faced by Urban Watta Dwellers During COVID-19 Period

The urban watta dwellers encountered several economic and social issues during the COVID-19 period, and they experienced some cultural issues as well. Urban watta dwellers were exhibiting some distinct cultural norms and values that had become ingrained in their daily lives. The slum has a culture all its own, and this culture is a way of life. Culture is learned, shared, and also transmittable. This learned way of life is passed from one generation to another. It is the habits, customs, behaviour/ patterns people have learned that move them to act in particular ways. Therefore, we can say that people themselves produce neither slums nor well-kept neighbourhoods (Garg,1976). However, according to the statements of respondents, it was identified that the COVID-19 endangered and threatened the existing cultural practices of urban slum dwellers, and it affected social exclusion and crystallizing marginalization as well.

The respondents expressed how much they missed celebrating the festivals that they were accustomed to organizing. They explained that there are various ethnic and religious communities within their watta (slum), and therefore they could celebrate all the festivals in the entire year. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they couldn't celebrate any festival, and they emphasized that they used to celebrate festivals gloriously, but this time they couldn't

even celebrate puberty festival (*kotahalu magula*). They were really worried about that absence.

Furthermore, they explained that they couldn't engage in religious practices such as going to the church, kovil, or temple. When they were in a disaster situation, they used to do '*Bodhi Pooja*', prayers in the church, and *Pooja* in the kovil. But even though the COVID-19 pandemic situation was a disaster situation, they couldn't engage in such practices, and that was a shortfall situation in which they could have attained some relief during the pandemic situation.

The urban slum dwellers have a number of relations in the other neighbourhood slums such as Modarawatta, Kurusawatta, and Sayurupura, etc. They used to have a close relationship with their relatives, such as visiting their houses in the evenings, having parties, engaging in community-based activities, etc. However, during the lockdown period, they stated that they were unable to keep connections with their relatives, at least over the phone, because of the unavailability of phone reloads and the closure of communication centres.

Urban slum dwellers had some noteworthy social relationships with their neighbours. Most of the time they (neighbours) were their relations as well. But during the COVID-19 lockdown period, they were utterly isolated and couldn't maintain the social relationships. One respondent said,

"When we got a jackfruit, we used to share it among all the neighbours. We also shared all our happy and sad moments with them. But all of these things were changed since we had to stay at home and we felt sad and loneliness."

(Respondent 20_48 Years_Married_Housewife_In depth Interviews)

Due to the lockdown situation, these kinds of cultural practices were overlooked, and that impacted urban slum dwellers emotionally, making them feel like an isolated community. This situation can be identified as a cultural exclusion as well. The expression "cultural exclusion" refers to a specific form of social exclusion, namely that which takes place every time "people are discriminated against because of their perceived cultural differences with the culturally dominant group". More generally, cultural exclusion may be seen as a by-product of other forms of socio-economic exclusion, which often find reflection in the organisation of rural and urban space. This is certainly the case when it comes to people living in the slums of the so-called "megacities" or "hypercities" of the developing world, as well as in some ghettos of Western nations (González, 2017).

Therefore, the cultural issues encountered by urban watta dwellers tend to be culturally excluded. This can be identified as another situation in which they encounter social exclusion and marginalization as well.

Adhering to New Healthcare Practices

Since the COVID-19 pandemic affected all economic, social, and political structures, several new healthcare practices were implemented, such as social distancing, mask usage, hand

washing, and the use of sanitizers. People started to continue these practices and integrate them into their day-to-day lives.. However, there are some differences within different social stratifications when adhering to these practices. Higher- and middle-income communities tolerated these practices, but this situation discourages low-income urban communities from adopting them. Specifically, urban watta dwellers in Sri Lanka. Once a respondent exemplified,

" If we want to do this job, we have to adhere to these practices willingly or unwillingly. Now I have to sanitise my hands each time when I sell something and when I touch money. Therefore I have to use around 324 bottles per week, and it's a huge cost to me. Adhering to these kinds of practices is a complicated task to poor people like us."

(Respondent 01_58 Years_Married_Boutique Owner_In depth Interviews)

Manisha (2020) explained that India has a population density of 200,000 people per square kilometre in slums like Dharavi in Mumbai, which means that social distancing is almost impossible. The urban slum population is more susceptible to a deficiency of basic amenities like safe drinking water, sanitation, housing, and health care services. Healthcare institutions, the government, and the World Health Organization have been delivering lessons on hand washing and social distancing since the start of the pandemic. However, in most slums of the country, where a shared tap is the only water source, it is unclear how this segment of the population will adhere to the preventive guidelines. Poorly resourced settings are most vulnerable to any infectious disease.

According to the response mentioned above, it could be identified that adhering to new healthcare practices created some disputes among urban watta (slum) dwellers, not just in India but also in the Sri Lankan context as well. Besides, constantly sanitising hands, washing hands, and doing PCR tests were complex and unaffordable tasks for this community. In addition, social distancing is also another kind of disputed task. According to the researchers' observation, around 8 to 10 members lived in each family, which had a minimal house area. Therefore, people couldn't adhere to those kinds of new health care practices.

Re-shaping Social Identity

The COVID-19 situation affected the changing social identity of watta dwellers. Tajfel (1979), defined social identity as a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Tajfel explains that the social groups to which they belong are an essential source of pride and self-esteem; social identity is a sense of belonging to the social world.

As a specific community in the urban sector, urban slum dwellers also had this kind of unique self-identity, which derived from their unique cultural values and social behaviour. As a result of several behaviors and its affiliation with a specific subculture, this community was identified as an urban Watta community.

However, due to the several influences of the COVID-19 situation, this community had to divert their social behaviour and subcultural practices due to the new health care

implementation, such as social distancing and wearing masks. Washing hands: There are some cultural practices (playing with neighbours in the evening, celebrating festivals, chatting with neighbours, etc.) left behind as people adhere to new health care and social practices. This situation had an impact on them, and they felt as if their social identities had been reshaped. Greitmeyer (2012) explained that losing ethnocentrism and changing social identity involved social discrimination as well. And as a group, these discriminated groups had to encounter collectively changing social identities. It was identified that urban watta dwellers were socially excluded due to diverting their social identity as a specific subcultural community in the urban sector.

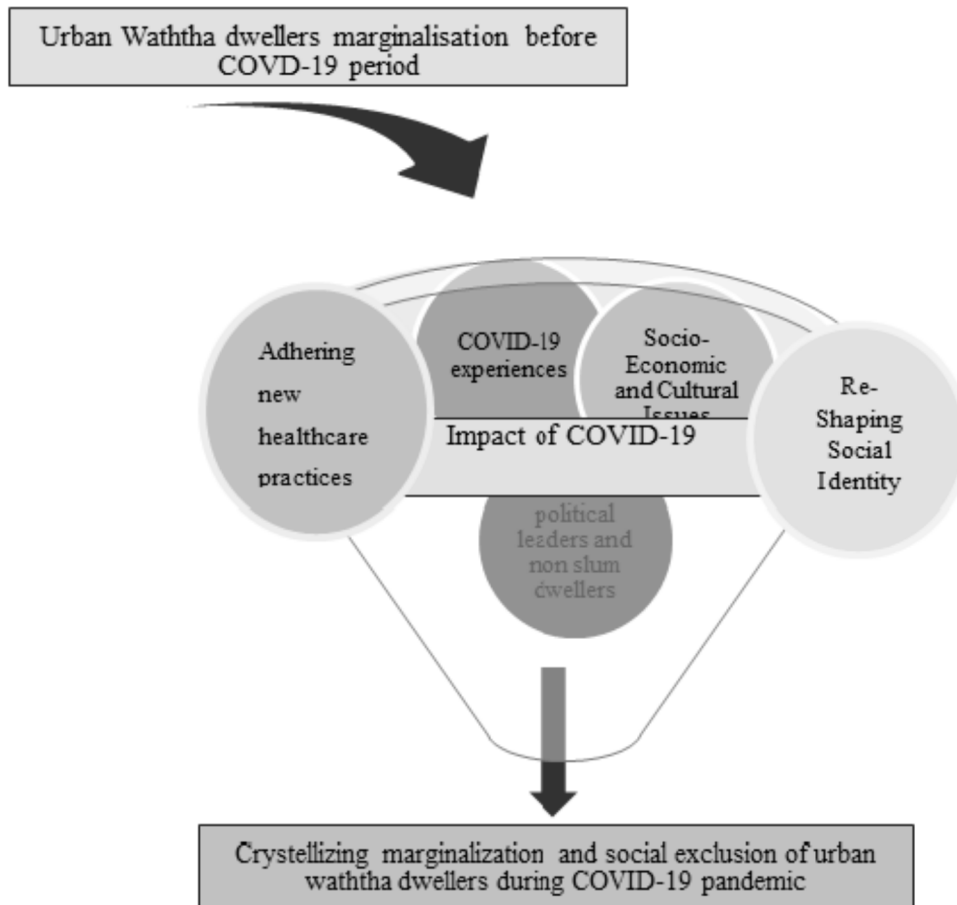


Figure 4.3 Major influential factors for crystallizing marginalization and social exclusion of urban waththa dwellers

The above figure depicts the factors related to social exclusion and marginalization of urban dwellers that have been mentioned previously.

Findings of the Study

COVID-19 was not merely a healthcare-related crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic had a massive impact on every socio-cultural and economic aspect of society. People encountered several new issues during COVID-19, and those issues were capable enough to divert their socio-political, cultural and economic lives to another level. Due to the influence of the COVID-19 situation, several new health care practices, such as social distancing, social

isolation, and quarantine, washing hands, and wearing masks were implemented. However, these new health care behaviours were entertained by several people in society. In contrast, some people from different social strata were highly vulnerable when adhering to this new healthcare system.

In addition, this study identified that urban watta (slum) dwellers as such kind of particular part of the society who had to encounter several issues when adhering to new healthcare implementations. Plus, they were identified as the most vulnerable community within the urban sector during the COVID-19 lockdown period. This research explored the fact that urban slum dwellers encountered several social, economic, political, and cultural issues during the lockdown. Specifically, social exclusion and marginalisation occurred during this lockdown period in a poor urban community.

Furthermore, this research identified social exclusion and marginalisation generated not merely through economic deprivation or income inequalities but by multidimensional factors. Social inequalities, poverty, unemployment, negligence in the policy-making process, encountering discrimination when entertaining cultural values and discrimination when receiving public services are such multidimensional factors that affect social exclusion and marginalisation.

This research identified that urban watta dwellers are a marginalised community even before the COVID-19 situation. It was identified that they were discriminated against when seeking jobs, dealing with non-slum dwellers, dealing with political leaders, and receiving educational services. All the factors contributed to proving that urban watta dwellers were already a marginalised community.

It was identified that urban slum dwellers experienced several incidents, such as staying at home, experiences within the peer slum community, experiences with non-slum dwellers, experiences within the religious community, and experiences with the mass media. Those incidents were also contributed to creating a marginalised and socially excluded community during the lockdown period. Changing their lifestyle due to staying at home, labelling as a "coronavirus spreading community" by peers in the slum community, discrimination by non-slum dwellers, discrimination by religious communities, and stigmatisation by mass media are such kind of new experiences that they faced during the lockdown period. They were socially excluded and marginalised because of the contribution of these factors.

Urban watta dwellers encountered several social, economic, and cultural issues during the lockdown period. Unemployment, job losses (chased away from existing jobs as labelling "responsible community for spreading coronavirus", zero income, inability to pay off debts and loans and inability to release mortgaged pieces of jewellery are some identified economic issues during the lockdown. Social issues faced by urban watta dwellers, such as violence and aggressive behaviours, extortion while receiving public services, and discrimination in public transportation, could be identified as the main issues. Inability to entertain cultural practices such as celebrating festivals, partying, inability to keep connections with relations who lived in other slums are cultural issues encountered by urban watta dwellers—ultimately identified

that those issues influenced crystallise social exclusion marginalisation of urban watta dwellers.

Un affordability of sanitisers, masks, and doing private PCR tests were issues encountered by urban watta dwellers when adhering to new healthcare practices. The inability to fulfill these needs led them to be socially excluded and marginalised during the lockdown period.

Politicians and the role of non -slum dwellers work for socially excluded and marginalised communities since they highly emphasised the sense of "otherness" during the lockdown period.

Urban watta dwellers had to re-shape their social identity from existing social identity, which provided asense of marginalisation.

This research explored how internal reflections of urban watta dwellers were re-shaped to accept social exclusion and marginalisation created by several factors during the COVID-19 period.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was explored that urban watta dwellers were a marginalised community even before the COVID-19pandemic, and that situation worsened during the lockdown period. The watta dwellers encountered several facets of social exclusion and marginalization due to several factors, such as when seeking jobs, dealing with non-slum dwellers, dealing with politicians, and exclusion within the educational institutions. This research identified that this community was marginalized and excluded when they experienced several incidents related to COVID-19pandemic. Furthermore, it was indicated that this community was excluded when they experienced some incidents, such as staying at home, experiences within the peer slum community, experiences with non- slum dwellers, experiences within the religious community, and experiences with the mass media.

Urban watta dwellers encountered several social, economic, and cultural issues during the lockdown period. When it came to adhering to new healthcare practices, urban watta dwellers faced challenges such as the cost of sanitizers, masks, and performing private PCR tests. The inability to fulfill these needs led them to be socially excluded and marginalised during the lockdown period. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 period, watta residents' social identities were reshaped.

As a result, it was discovered that the watta dwellers' marginalization and social exclusion were crystallized as a result of the influence of several policies and social, economic, and cultural factors that they newly encountered during the lockdown period.

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