

# Pune's poorest ate fewer meals during Covid lockdown: Study

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THE COVID-19 lockdown and economic slowdown hit the lowest income groups of Pune the hardest, even forcing them to cut their consumption of dal, meat and the overall number of daily meals, a new study has found.

The survey was conducted by Food, Water and Energy for Urban Sustainable Environment (FUSE), a transdisciplinary research project involving Food-Water-Energy Nexus in Pune, India and Amman, Jordan. Under FUSE, researchers from India, Jordan, the US, Germany and Austria work on interdisciplinary and applied research to understand food-water-energy systems.

The survey is a collaboration between the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE), Pune and German researchers.

A total of 194 households in the PMC limits were surveyed to understand the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resources and changes in the food, water and electricity consumption during July and August 2021. The families were categorised based on their annual incomes – less than Rs 50,000, between Rs 50,000 and Rs 2 lakh, between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 4 lakh, between Rs 4 lakh and Rs 8 lakh, and above Rs 8 lakh. The average family size in Pune was 4.22.

With the Covid lockdowns resulting in job losses for migrants and those employed in small ventures, the subsequent economic slowdown hit the lowest

income groups disproportionately. Nearly 92 households reported a drop in their monthly income and about 30 households among these reported that they earned half or less of their usual income. The salaried class, too, reported salary cuts and faced fears of job losses.

Due to this drop in income, a majority of households reported a significant change in their food habits and several meals consumed in a day, the study observed. "People's purchasing power was significantly affected due to the absolute decrease in income and the rising food inflation," the survey found.

While 76 per cent (147 households) used LPG for cooking, the workload on those involved in food preparation (51 per cent of households) reportedly increased during the pandemic period. The increase in cooking time reported by 38 per cent (74 households) was due to family members staying indoors and having all meals at home, forced by the pandemic restrictions.

Some households reported to have reduced their fish, meat and egg consumption due to financial constraints due to the economic slowdown. Consumption of dal, too, reduced owing to the same reason and the monthly purchases reduced to half as compared to pre-pandemic purchases. The least affected households were those with annual income above Rs 8 lakh, who reported no change in their income during the pandemic.

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