

# Volunteerism, Crisis Management and Intervention In COVID -19 Pandemic- A Case Study of Jeevan Rakshika Initiative.

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## ABSTRACT

*The present study aimed to expand an understanding about the care-based initiatives undertaken by Jeevan Rakshika Anti-Covid Helpline in Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi with the students during covid-19. This relationship was explored on the basis of three dimensions - a) the relationship between teacher and student, the Peer group relationship and the relationship between stakeholders of educational institutions and civil society initiatives. These three diverse dimensions talk about the process of development of human infrastructure in educational institutions and answers about how hope and empathy developed when everyone was under lock down situations. The present research paper examined how teacher student relationship emerged as defensive actions against the psychological challenges posed by covid-19. It also served as the motivating factors to work for the communities in need specifically in the region of Bawana where most of the industries are situated and marginalized labour communities working in those industries reside in the nearby slum settlements around college. Along with this there are also significant rural communities who lacked digital accessibility. These were the major sections in need which were being served by the efforts of Jeevan Rakshika Anti Covid Network of college through 'digital coordination'. The present paper is a detailed analysis of the process, efforts and challenges involved in this whole journey.*

**Key Words:** *Crisis management, Covid -19, Health, Initiative, Jeevan Rakshika, Volunteerism*

## Introduction

When the doors were shut, teachers and students developed a network that helped them in learning and getting into direct social work with the people in need through virtual interactions. Multiple hours of interaction between various stakeholders about challenges, providing a window for ventilation to the depressive thoughts, anxiety and burnout, consequently resulted in

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an incredible infrastructure based on human emotions and needs during pandemic. Burnout situation occurred not only in the lives of students, rather it was rooted there in the families of each and every stakeholder across the sections. In such a situation the relationship that was developed based on the above three dimensions addressed major concerns right from emergency help to creating a safer space for reaching out to people in need.

During COVID 19, based on integrated and holistic approach to address the issues and concerns of vulnerable people, the forty-two student volunteers along with three faculty volunteers – Prof. Mamta Sharma, Dr. Sunita Bahmani and Dr. Mali Devi Sawariya established a network of Jeevan Rakshika Anti-Covid initiative across all the disciplines emerged as a human infrastructure and evolved as a hope. It was the time when community and fraternity from Aditi Mahavidyalaya came together to defeat this pandemic situation and to protect the people in need and distress. These volunteers relentlessly dedicated their time and efforts through ‘digital coordination’ in matching ‘lead’ availability with the ‘needs’ of the people, survivors and families. The team presented the process of working with marginalized people by providing oxygen cylinders, ration kits to 180 families once a week, cooked meal to more than 100 families on daily basis, arranging plasma for patients, sanitary pads to adolescent girls in Bawana slum settlements through multiple level networking with organizations like Dreamland Society, Inception of Life and Our Rights and Social Society, Amoli Society, also by coordinating reproductive Health Care awareness sessions in coordination with Venkateswara Hospital for students and communities, arranging accessible and approachable method of vaccination to more than 18000 stakeholders with maximum safety and care. The volunteers also presented their experiences of participation in the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan Student Ambassadors Training Programme organized by the Department of Social Work, University of Delhi (2021). With the following significant **objectives**, Jeevan Rakshika Anti Covid Initiative was able to accomplish the humanitarian needs with dedicated approach towards team work:

- To develop a holistic understanding of contemporary scenario with the help of expert panelists, stakeholders and professionals in the field.
- To construct and re-synthesize the academic ideas and dialogues for development of critical thinking skills of students.
- To incorporate diverse disciplines and practices for responding to the needs and concerns of all the college students innovatively.

### **Key Efforts**

In this unprecedented covid 19 situation what human communities witnessed was exceptional. On one hand the rate of infection is rising on the other hand

whatever the health care infrastructure be, it is always going to be insufficient for the ever-increasing demand for oxygen, medicine, beds, space, and everything that is needed. It was the time for integrated human and natural infrastructure to work. In the very initial phase, our volunteers shared their vision of their objective behind joining Jeevan Rakshika. One of them shared that – *'I lost my family member; it broke my family and its survivors. I don't want anyone to go through what I had witnessed. Through Jeevan Rakshika, I just want to help people and save their families'*. It was dedication and passion of such student volunteers that helped Jeevan Rakshika to reach out to people beyond Delhi also. Together with college stakeholders, Jeevan Rakshika accomplished following major initiatives with 'volunteerism' as its core in reaching out to our needy social world:

### **Effective Interventions**

By collaborating with organizations like Project StepOne and IndiaCares Foundation, authors participated in the Plasma Donation Drive by the college under Delhi University. Inspired by it, on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021, we launched our first 'plasma donation drive' initiative for our college under Jeevan Rakshika. Then we organized a webinar on "Creating Human Support System To Combat Pandemic- Plasma Donation Awareness" on Saturday, 15th May, 2021. The significant aim of this awareness session was to prepare the Volunteers "How we can make create awareness amongst donors to donate their plasma after recovery from Covid-19". In this webinar our resource persons from India Cares Foundation shared their insight and experiences on how to convince donors, building rapport, how to eliminate the misconceptions & myths related to plasma donation & also on the ways to educate the volunteers about Plasma Donation process. Through this drive we were able to provide plasma to the six needy patients in hospitals till 18<sup>th</sup> May 2021. In order to make our reach wider to the needy sections of society, we created social media platforms like Twitter so that we can reach to services available and the needs of the people.

Further, in collaboration with the Internal Quality Assurance Cell, we organized a panel discussion with resource persons from Our Rights and Social Society on "The Essence Of Volunteering In Pandemic – Building Human Infrastructure" 20th May, 2021 via google meet. This Panel discussion helped our volunteers to strengthen their perspectives on "how the volunteers can help to reach the essential resources to help the vulnerable people in this widespread of Covid-19 or how volunteerism can be the foremost human service in combating this pandemic?" This dialogue was successful in providing the information on the creation of multi-layered and multi-level intervention for our campaign. It was really educative, engaging and fulfilling because of the much-needed guidance about role of student volunteers in providing services to the people in need.

Team also focused on Information Education & Communication because it was an integral and important component of our programme to promote our services to the vulnerable people and families. Through this campaign, we were able to verify around 105 leads, referred, provided leads and were able to fulfil needs of around 10 people on daily basis by providing linkages for oxygen, beds and blood donation. It attained greater importance in our Anti-Covid Helpline awareness and development of the knowledge base. By using this approach, we made posters, wrote poems & made awareness videos for public health education.

### **Community Outreach through Partner Organizations:**

Community outreach in Jeevan Rakshika is about giving, contributing, and helping those who were unable to coordinate with leads digitally. Community outreach also allowed us to influence younger generations of our volunteers to give back to the community and to be a helping hand in these worst times. In this three organizations *Inception of Life, Dreamland & Our Rights & Social Society* became our backbone in helping communities living in slums around Bawana. We helped them in coordinating online for resources and they assisted us in contributing ration kits & sanitary pads to women and adolescent girls. Through digital collaboration with our partner agencies, we were able to provide sanitary pads to around hundred girls and women in the community with the help of Amoli Society for Women through Dreamland Organization; weekly ration kits to around 80 families and cooked meals till date to more than 100 families daily in Bawana.

### **Session on 'Reproductive Health during Pandemic Times'**

This session was organized by Venkateshwara Hospital to address the reproductive health concerns of students and communities of college on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021. The session was facilitated by faculty and was really useful for the students as it addressed the diverse reproductive health concerns of the girl students of college. Along with this, an e-poster competition was also organized to address the menstrual hygiene related concerns of students.

### **Research Objectives**

- To motivate youth volunteers in crisis management during pandemic.
- To identify the beneficiaries from community in Bawana region.
- To educate the community and college stakeholders by using multi-media resources.
- To comprehend the effectiveness of three diverse human relationships

- teacher-student, peer group and inter-organizational network established to combat covid 19.
- To analyze the impact of Jeevan Rakshika initiative on development and growth of volunteers.

## **Research Methodology**

### **a) Universe of the Study**

1. People affected by COVID- 19 all over India
2. Youth volunteers from college and NGOs

### **b) Sample**

1. Beneficiaries of Jeevan Rakshika Initiative in Delhi
2. Volunteers of Jeevan Rakshika

### **c) Sample Size:**

1. 50 Beneficiaries of Jeevan Rakshika Initiative in Delhi
2. 42 Volunteers of Jeevan Rakshika

### **d) Sampling Method:**

Purposive Sampling to gather enriched data as per researcher's objectives.

### **e) Research Method:**

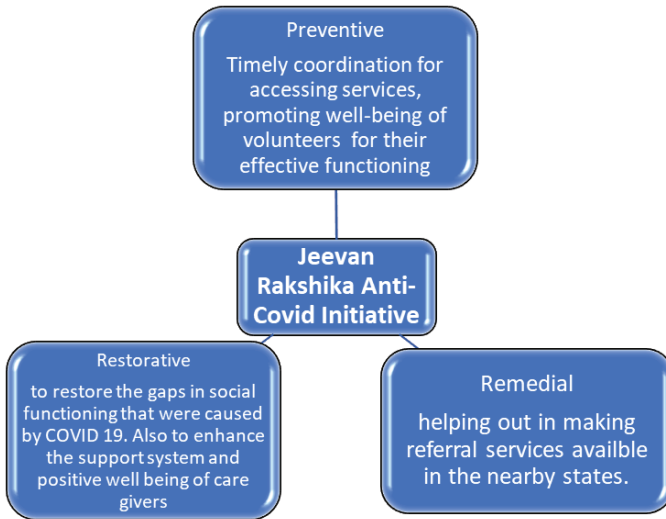
1. Interview through online and offline method. Interview Schedule comprised of open-ended questions.
2. Focus Group Discussions with four groups of volunteers with ten members in each group.
3. Observation by faculty coordinators in whole journey.

## Major Findings

**Effectiveness of Human Relationships as Infrastructure:** This research paper emphasizes on understanding and reflection upon the possibility and experiences of using human relationship as the infrastructure with an objective of defend the social world against the stressful impact of COVID 19. As discussed above, the emergence of Jeevan Rakshika as a significant remedial intervention to prevent the faculty members, students, non-teaching staff as well as stakeholders to prevent them from breaking down during lock down times. The model of human relationships created by the above initiative encouraged us to be like a bridge by providing an equilibrium in cross sectional relationships during the times of human crisis. We adapted the strategy to channelize the emotions, strengths and principles of social work positively in three primary dimensions of relationships.

**Teacher- Student Relationship:** The group was facilitated by the authors with 42 female student volunteers who came forward to reach out to people in need by coordinating lead availability from all possible sources 24x7. During the initial phase of group formation, 42 volunteers shared their views about its significance and objectives. Many of them connected the group's name and work to - women coming forward to save life of others, as they called it 'Life Savior *Naari*' who protected people during times of crisis and redefined humanitarian motifs. The core of the majority of responses was - 'Helping Humanity to Strive against Pandemic'. These narratives reflected that the interactions between faculty members and students was more inclined towards awareness of self, gender equity and responsibility as a volunteer. Moreover, one of them also shared that for her, Jeevan Rakshika stood as a symbol of nonprofit human endeavor. These long hours of interaction and communication between faculty members and volunteers not only opened the ventilation but also prepared the volunteers to meet the future challenges. That is the reason that around 98% of the volunteers shared that enough information about vision, process, challenges and interventions was provided to strengthen the roads ahead. This process of going beyond defined professional and personal time limits to listen to the volunteers encouraged them to express themselves and to develop resilience. Around 99% of them shared that the daily meetings and interactions were helpful in developing the group's efforts towards positive direction and in meeting daily needs of the communities by establishing virtual and telephonic interactions about lead and motif. Majority of volunteers shared during the feedback that effective coordination from faculty members encouraged the spirit of team building, development of a rapid action plan and ensuring complete dedication for the humanitarian cause. Most of them shared that they felt like a warrior with individual qualities like patience, dedicated listening, virtual meeting schedule development skills, documentation and

record keeping, calling the needy and listening to them for hours etc. in these crisis times. The overall classification of objectives of group's conversations on daily basis in initiation phase was following:



We reaffirmed the purpose of the social work profession in the formation and orientation of the group of volunteers by providing them enough time to express, listen and share their feelings and thoughts. In this process we ensured that there must be value-based orientation - social justice, respect for human dignity and worth and most importantly equal treatment of all the stakeholders. During these conversation volunteers strongly used to put forth their belief, experiences and thoughts about how the world has changed, how their behavior patterns have been influenced due to lock down and most of them also shared that COVID 19 has shut the doors of gender equality as now when most of the female volunteers were locked inside their homes, their gender roles were being underlined every day. Consider for example, one of them shared that now they were not being seen as the receptors of education, as their family members felt that this was the right opportunity to get them married due to economic reasons. Despite dwelling in the major family conflicts most of the volunteers ensured their commitment for the humanitarian cause and were able to redefine their purpose of life as a Jeevan Rakshika member. They also shared that earlier late and untimely conversations were not allowed by the family head, now they switch on the mike of the google meet to make their families listen to their initiatives and hence these conversations made them feel prouder about being true to themselves. Hence, during these relationships' teacher-student both mutually shared, participated, accepted and respected each other's dignity. These conversations also helped the volunteers make informed decisions

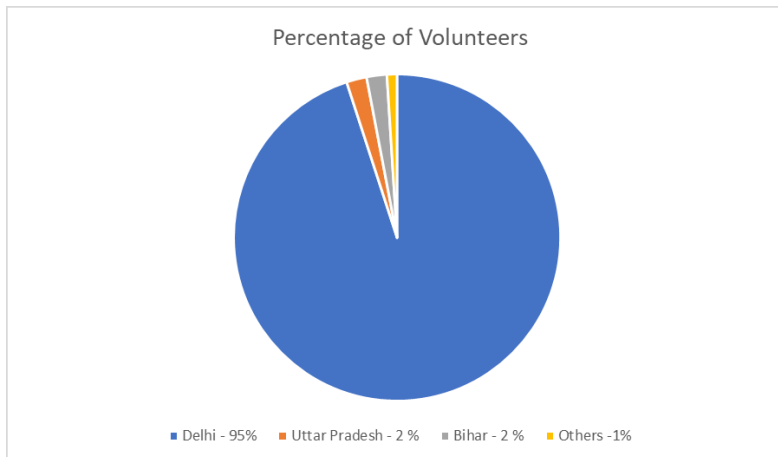


in their personal and professional lives. Raised above self-interest, these volunteers were able to talk about the challenges, for instance - how to gather strength to listen to the frustrating behavior patterns of caregivers and family members in the hospitals. These interactions not only made each stakeholder realize their inherited worth and skills but also enhanced their competencies, problem solving skills and coping abilities. The centrality of these interactions was human relationship and commitment for optimum utilization of available resources and making it accessible to every possible person in need. During the process of the conversations, faculty members trusted the right of volunteers to make independent and informed decisions for all by creating new resource systems to enhance responsiveness to human needs.

**The Peer Group Relationship :** As already discussed above, the purpose of this group of volunteers was made clear in the very beginning phase itself by the faculty members as facilitators. However, the consequent processes were based on inter-group discussions about the dynamic purposes, goals and future vision of the group. During the first phase, it was observed that the group decided to have one common platform without any specific member as the leader. As the group was cross-disciplinary, the attributes were also full of varied skills and competencies that really helped in adequate consideration of the needs of people. The group promoted and functioned with one common guideline - *'Everyone is a leader in Jeevan Rakshika. We all are ours and each other's leaders.* This common bond not only helped in synthesizing each other's values but also celebrated every individual's determination as a group member. The common perceived need of pandemic was to work on medical emergencies, making necessities available to the needy communities and also to develop a strong sensitized network to build awareness amongst college and community stakeholders. Hence, the purpose was to reach the 'public' at margins. Due to the engagement of students residing in Bawana slum settlements, these group members were able to gather all necessary information, resources and made it possible for them to reach the vulnerable communities. Hence, the group members from Bawana slums became a bridge between college and community. Later on, it was observed that each day of crisis taught group members that the purpose was being reformulated every day as it was not static with the crisis, it was dynamic in nature. For instance, with the dynamic changes in plasma donation and medical intervention policy, there was consequent change in the behavior patterns of the caregivers of the covid patients in hospital. The group volunteers witnessed that on the one hand a section of doctors believed that plasma could save life while on the other hand there were continuous orders from government policy makers that prohibited use of plasma in treatment of covid patients. In these situations of ambiguity and confusions, these group members consulted and shared their thoughts and feelings with each other about how to support the care givers in such situations. They relied on each

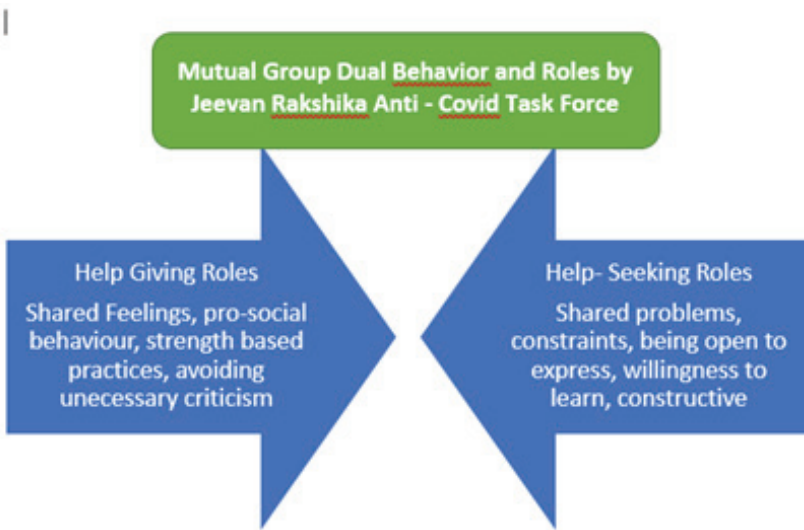


other during burn out situations and neutralizing emotional stressors. At times, their effective peer group relationship helped them in gathering strength by forming a network and support system of advice from caregivers whose patients recovered successfully. These were the narratives from each other that guided them on how to work further in critical cases. Most significant aspect of the whole idea in action was communication with the needy persons beyond time limits. This task was significant to assess the nature and need of medical emergencies. The volunteers used to discuss with each other about how to console the person in distress, the ways to develop hope and a caring environment and shared the verbal phrases that symbolized empathy in communication. Decision making and the problem assessment were two tasks in which the whole group discussed with each other about the action plans. Volunteers also developed a sense of group identity and shared a planned group action timeline with the facilitators every day. This democratic process of the group's functioning not only assisted in building mutual trust but also promoted the group's goal achievement in the critical situations of failure at times. There were no overriding factors as the leadership was merged in each individual's actions and efforts. There was a significant sense of assimilation of culture, beliefs and values that the facilitators witnessed when all the volunteers developed vital relationships to fulfill their responsibilities. The volunteers were situated all across various locations in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The proportion wise location of the volunteers is demonstrated as below:



These diverse locations helped the volunteers in developing their plan of action and understanding of available resources across these three states. For instance, they arranged for a plasma donor who came from Bihar to help the COVID patient in AIIMS Delhi. Through peer group consultation, the volunteers were also able to develop hope, aspirations for life and strength to

provide group support. Hence, in this process, there was no difference between individual and group's purpose and goals as the unity got strengthened with time in making peer group relations much more reliant. For inputs and advice, they were able to approach each other, they were very much open to feedback and support in cases of overlapping tasks, and most of them refrained from blaming other members. During the times of failure to access resources, they all tend to encourage and motivate each other to move and act collectively. Thus, these volunteers were unique in functioning as a group as they were involved in seeking as well as giving help. The process is demonstrated as below:



As the peer group relationship got strengthened with time and efforts, there were also requests from other students who wanted to join Jeevan Rakshika Team. There were no reservations but the group members made sure that there must be an enriched orientation of the new members about dedication, commitment and challenges to the cause. The volunteers shared their individual contacts and resources with each other so as to meet the goal and synchronized the availability of lead for resources to support the group's efforts. Most of them expressed their caring concerns for other group members in the daily meetings, cooperation and support of each other, shared learning from problems/dilemmas with each other, demonstrated the solutions that emerged in critical situations and shared constructive feedback for future strengthened mutual trust and relationship with each other. Peer observation and sharing about the functional and dysfunctional behavior patterns of the group members helped in building a constructive space where they can discuss personal as well as

task related issues without any fear. Like, few volunteers used to share how their gender specific role of being a home caretaker transformed into the role of help provider to the vulnerable people. It not only encouraged a feeling of being a proud human in pandemic times but also made them prepared for future challenges.

### **The Inter - Organizational relationship**

This section of the paper aims to develop an understanding about the inter-linkages between college as a site of Jeevan Rakshika Operation and its linkages with institutions and civil society organizations. As the second wave was the most stressful time when pandemic hit worst globally, the emergence of Jeevan Rakshika and its operational processes were significant in making primary resources available to the marginalized population in slum settlement of Bawana Industrial Area. Most of them are migrants involved as labor in these industries who faced brutal economic shutdown during the second wave. In this situation, the volunteers developed an exploratory approach to utilize unfamiliar techniques to directly consult the civil society organizations situated in central Delhi to provide food and other resources in the community. However, it was also a complex process because due to lockdown transportation was also a challenge. It was due to the support of community people that they arranged a transportation vehicle collectively and requested the authorities to move ahead to a specific organization for bringing food for all., A volunteer from Our Rights Social Society played a vital role in making the accessibility, collection and distribution possible by collaborating with another organizational leaders from Dreamland and Inception of Life. It was during this phase, they shared his experiences about the 'double marginalization' of community people in the K Block location due to a fire emergency in which around twenty five families lost their shelter and home. At the same time, there was seasonal variation as the monsoon began, this made the situation more troubling for the community because all the Jhuggis got submerged into rain water. Devoid of basic primary care, the people searched for a shelter that was arranged by Jeevan Rakshika through Dreamland Organization. They started a shelter in the organization's office for taking care of women and children in the community due to the paucity of safer space. It was in these critical situations that the primary care needs - ration, food, shelter, clothes, medical support, emergency care, sanitary pads and counseling of women and children were being provided by the volunteers by coordinating with various organizations like ISKCON Foundation, Zomato and Amoli Society for Women. For this networking, the volunteers actively utilize all social media platforms for notifying the nature of needs, availability of leads and list of organizations who came forward in the process of giving help. They also made timely notifications on college website so that the awareness about maintaining psychological health, phone number

of mental health facilitators, peer group counselors, vaccination updates and guidelines for operational vaccination centers inside college campus. With the district administration vaccination team, volunteers were able to maintain the safer working environment and follow up of covid precautionary measures for the people who came for vaccination inside the college campus.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

As stated above, the quality outcome-oriented approach in the functioning of Jeevan Rakshika Initiative resulted in community wide inculcation of knowledge and skills. It was essentially based on public recognition of the efforts of social work ethics and ethos (Encyclopedia of Social Work, 2013). Our volunteers also participated in celebration of second National Social Work Week 2021, Nupur Miglani Student Coordinator of Jeevan Rakshika, Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi had represent the initiatives done by Voices in response to Covid-19 on National Level in the event of National Association of Professional Social Workers in India (NAPSWI) on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2021 and volunteers were grateful to the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India that they gave them the opportunity to showcase best practices in response to Covid-19. That event was very insightful, volunteers were able to deliver our team efforts with an enlightened vision for the future. With the unprecedented times of crisis, the human infrastructure developed by Jeevan Rakshika stands strong as a bridge between educational institutions and community organization. We believe that it will grow stronger with many hands joined together and civil society initiatives to develop volunteerism at its best in times of crisis as hope for better life.

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