Informal Rental Housing Typologies and Experiences of Low-income Migrant Renters in Gurgaon, India

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Abstract

A significant proportion of the working poor in Asian cities live in slums as renters. An estimated 60–90 per cent of low-income rentals in Asia are in the informal sector; 25 per cent of India's housing stock comprises informal rentals. Yet informal rentals remain an understudied area. Through an empirical study, this article illustrates the typologies of informal rental housing in urban villages and unauthorized colonies in Gurgaon, a city of 1.2 million located within India's National Capital Region (NCR). Further, through qualitative fieldwork, the article sheds light on how renters, usually low-income migrants, leverage informal rentals to negotiate the city. The research finds that while informal rentals offer advantages of affordability, flexibility and proximity to livelihoods for migrants, they are also sites of exploitation and poor living conditions. Further, the study reveals that social networks that carry over from places or origin as well as household migration strategies strongly influence housing choices in the informal rentals market.

非正式出租住房类型学和印度古尔冈低收入移民租房者的经验

亚洲城市中有显著比例的在职贫困人群是居住在贫民窟中的租房者。据估计亚洲低收入租房者中60–90%居住在非正式住宅中；印度住房存量的25%属于非正式住房。然而，非正式出租住房仍是一个没有得到充分研究的领域。通过实证研究，本文阐释了古尔冈城中村和未获正式许可的聚居地中的非正式出租住房的类型学，古尔冈位于印度国家首都地区，拥有120万人口。此外，通过定性的实地调研，本文阐明了租房者，通常是低收入移民，如何通过非正规出租住房的杠杆作用与城市进行博弈。研究发现，虽然非正式出租住房在可支付性、灵活性和贴近移民谋生之道等方面具有优势，它们仍然是经过了开发的生活条件很差的场所。此外，研究表明，从其他地方或者家乡带来的社交网络以及家庭迁移策略极大地影响了非正式出租住房市场的选择。

Keywords

Housing, rental housing, informality, migrants, migration, Gurgaon, landlordism, urban villages

Background

Numerous scholars including Davis (2006) have drawn out the links between neoliberal citymaking and informality and in turn the connections between informality and poverty. Many Asian cities—Shanghai, Mumbai and Jakarta to name a few—have undergone dramatic transformations as a result of Western as

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well as home-grown forms of neoliberal citymaking. Ghertner's (2011) work on Delhi's aspirations to be a world-class city points to the city's desire to move away from the image of slums and squalor even as the number of people living in unplanned, poorly serviced parts of the city continues to grow. What's more, a large number of the working poor, especially new entrants to the city live in slums and other informal settlements as renters. An estimated 60–90 per cent of low-income rentals in Asia are in the informal sector (UN-Habitat & UNESCAP, 2008) and 25 per cent of India's housing stock comprises informal rentals (National Sample Survey Organisation, 2010).

Ananya Roy (2009) suggests that informality in India's cities is not just caused by a failure of planning, but is indeed a 'key feature' of the idiom of urbanization in India. Further, she describes informality as a 'state of deregulation' in which the laws on the ownership and usage of land are 'open-ended and subject to multiple interpretations and interests'. Roy also draws attention to the practice of 'unmapping' in the governance of Indian cities, where the state uses informality 'as an instrument of both accumulation and authority' by the wilful change of land use often in contravention to the state's own laws.

In Gurgaon, a suburban city of 1.2 million people located in India's National Capital Region (NCR), these forms of informalization are evident. Media has widely reported the failure of urban planning as evidenced by the poor infrastructure and inadequate quality of life offered to citizens (Yardley, 2011). Further, the city is planned through what Gururani (2013) refers to as 'flexible planning', which uses exemptions, compromises and brute force repetitively and iteratively to fulfil a vision that favours the elite. Gururani interprets Gurgaon as an 'illegal settlement' boldly secured through class power, political (and caste) allegiances and global capital. In spatial terms, this is manifested in a focus on real estate development through the appropriation of agricultural lands from farmers. This land has been utilized to create commercial and residential real estate targeted towards upper income buyers, while informal areas of the city like urban villages—areas of inhabitation that predate urbanization—and unauthorized colonies—created by the illegal plotting of agricultural land—have been left to absorb the residual industrial and residential activity. Indeed, the researcher observes that a tight control on land in the city frustrates any attempts of the urban poor to illegally occupy or squat on land. Erstwhile farmers, in the absence of agricultural income, have taken up landlordism as a de facto occupation. As a result, nearly all low-income housing in Gurgaon exists as a form of informal rentals.

In such a scenario, Gurgaon serves as a laboratory to understand more about how informal rental housing works. How do informal rentals serve as an entry point for migrants? What quality of life does informal rental housing offer to the urban poor and are there means for making improved housing choices within the rentals market? How does informal renting impact the access of the working urban poor to jobs, services and amenities? Is it an incubator for the urban poor as they negotiate a path of economic mobility?

This article presents a qualitative study of Gurgaon's informal rentals market with a view to (i) study the diversity and characteristics of informal rental housing in Gurgaon and (ii) understand the mechanisms and motivations by which low-income migrant workers in the city occupy, utilize and move between the various informal rental housing typologies.

The first section of the article provides a literature review of informal rental housing in India, including some Asian examples, with a view to illustrate the dominant patterns. The second section comments on Gurgaon's planning history and socio-economic context that created conditions for informal landlords to take on the role of making housing available to the urban poor, largely low-income migrants. The third section presents the typologies of rental housing found in Gurgaon and discusses tenure, location, rental management and housing quality across typologies. It also comments on practices of informal landlordism in the city. The fourth section examines how the migrant renter leverages the informal rental market to negotiate the city. It also presents some narratives that illustrate the mechanisms of housing and mobility across housing typologies.

Methods

The article uses mixed methods to explore informal rental housing in Gurgaon. The findings of a household-level questionnaire survey of 450 households conducted by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Agrasar broadly informs the research about the location, migration status and places of origin, housing condition and occupation of the working poor in Gurgaon. Existing recordings of call-in shows on community radio station *Gurgaon ki Awaaz* revealed narratives told by migrant tenants and shed light on their experiences in the city.

Observations made during multiple site visits to four urban villages (Nathupur, Chakkarpur, Tikri and Samaspur) and one unauthorized colony (Devi Lal Colony) informed the evolution of informal rental housing typologies. These were documented through architectural drawings, sketches and photographs. Further, interviews with tenants, landlords and civil society actors offered the opportunity to explore aspects, such as, experience, motivation and aspiration, all key to understanding the role of informal rentals. Sampling for the respondent interviews maintained diversity across place of origin, gender and age group in keeping with the findings of the primary survey.

Semi-structured interviews with 45 migrant renters deep dived into their experiences with informal rental housing and included questions on housing type/size, rental amount, access to amenities, family size, migration pattern, livelihoods, citizenship, interaction with local authorities, income, etc. Interactions with seven landlords provided insights into tenant–landlord relations and the processes of creating and managing rental housing. Interviews with three active members of Gurgaon's civil society helped understand broader issues related to the development of Gurgaon as well as attitudes towards migrant communities in the city.

Informal Rental Housing: Existing Literature

Research on housing informality has focused largely on slum dwellers with issues, such as, property titles and tenure at the core of the debate. Slum resettlement and redevelopment programmes in India, such as, the Basic Services for the Urban Poor (BSUP), a part of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), and the Rajiv Awas Yojana (RAY) that offered government-subsidized housing to the urban poor have struggled with the issue of eligibility (Mahadevia, Datey & Mishra, 2013). They have found it difficult to establish which households are entitled to resettlement using the oft-discussed 'cut-off date' clause; further, they have had no way to address housing needs of renters who live in informal settlements. Renters have been seen as those without claims and have been most often left out of these programmes.

Several studies that address housing informality have identified the limitations of imagining housing adequacy from the perspective of home ownership and pointed to the need to pay attention to rental housing; yet very little empirical work exists on informal rental housing. These studies suggest that the urban poor, especially migrants, rely on rental housing to gain a foothold into the city. Studies across the world find tenants to generally be younger, often singles or couples with fewer children. Renting is seen to be characteristic of the early part of the life cycle; however, this is rapidly changing with context influenced by cultural values and social and demographic changes, such as, ageing, higher divorce rates or migration (UN-Habitat, 2003).

Owners are usually those who have legal or de facto right to occupy, let, use or dispose their dwelling (UN-Habitat, 2003). This ownership may happen in a range of tenures including leasehold, occupation

of contested land and ownership of land in illegal settlements as is common across cities in India and certainly in Delhi and Gurgaon. Those who pay rent to live in someone else's home are called tenants, while those who do not pay a regular rent—though they may pay rent in kind—are sharers. In India, hidden renters like grown children who do not leave the home or relatives who share space with owners are not uncommon.

Most of the rental housing stock in Asian cities is provided by landlords, who rent out additional space created by building extensions to their own homes; in India, small landlords contribute 80 per cent of the rented units available (Asian Development Bank, 2013). In the informal rental market, landlords create, maintain and operate rental stock usually located in informal/quasi-legal urban settlements. Research shows that small (non-commercial) landlords who own under 10 rental units are the predominant category. They usually live on the premises and share socio-economic characteristics with their tenants (UN-Habitat, 2003). Kumar (1996) called these small landlords who subdivide extremely small lots (20 sq. m in India) and use the rent to supplement essential consumption 'subsistence' landlords. He also describes two other types of landlordism—'petty bourgeoisie' landlords, who are not forced to rent out, but choose to do so to supplement their income and make improvements to their housing, and 'petty-capitalist' landlords who see renting as a business proposition and invest in the purchase of additional lots to build accommodation to rent out with an intent to accumulate capital.

A wide variety of informal rental practices have existed in Asian cities; however, the absence of formal contracts is common across the board; often there exists only a verbal understanding between tenant and landlord. Sinha (2014) finds that oral contracts between tenants and landlords in Hyderabad's informal settlements are the prevalent forms of agreement and signify trust; further, family and social networks play a key role for migrants to be able to access rental housing.

In the *seng* system, which prevails in Thailand and originates from a Chinese practice, tenants pay a large lump sum at the beginning of the lease period, which can last from 3 to 50 years, then paying a nominal monthly rent for the time of occupation. This usually allowed landlords to get quick returns on investment on money spent on developing the rental properties (Asian Development Bank, 2013). Kumar (2001) found that landlords in Bangalore also take lump sum advances from tenants in a similar way to raise capital. This amount is usually equivalent of 10 months of rent. In other cities, like Surat, where tenants are usually migrants employed as daily wage labourers in the city's textile and jewellery industry, Kumar (2001) found that landlords were erstwhile migrants who had acquired cheap urban land and developed rental properties. These were usually leased out as single or shared rooms often accompanied by meals. In Philippines, a study found that informal renting was concentrated in depressed settlements—about 80 per cent residents in such areas were renters—mostly in the peripheral and coastal areas of Metro Manila. Here, housing quality was poor and homeowners saw renting only as supplemental income (Ballesteros, 2004). Concern for housing quality has also been expressed by Balbo (2005) who reports that recent international immigrants in Thailand live in rentals of poor quality.

In the context of China's large-scale industrialized urbanization, single gender migration is prevalent and dormitory-style rental housing is a common feature in Chinese cities. O'Donnell (2013) makes the claim that Shenzen's urban villages 'have provided informal solutions to boomtown conditions' through the development of real estate within these villages to provide rental housing and space for commercial activities. She also talks of urban villages as 'the architectural form through which migrants and low-status citizens have claimed rights to the city', drawing attention to the role informal rentals play in supporting informal labour markets, which in turn are the backbone of urban economies in Asia.

A recent study of Rajkot by Mahadevia and Gogoi (2011) looks at architectural typologies of informal rental housing, perhaps for the first time. They find that migrants in the city rent out single rooms in tenements, part of a house or a full house depending on the income level of the tenant household. As with

other studies of informal rentals, they confirm that tenants and landlords live in close proximity and often landlords are not much better off than the tenants.

While this sort of petty and petty-bourgeoisie landlordism described in Surat, Rajkot and Bangalore is common across the world, large-scale production of informal rental housing by private landlords has only been documented in the case of Nairobi (Huchzermeyer, 2007). It is the observation of all three forms of landlordism—subsistence, petty-bourgeoisie and petty-capitalist—in Gurgaon that is unique and makes the city an ideal site to look at informal rental housing in more detail.

The Peculiar Case of Gurgaon

Located in the Indian state of Haryana, Gurgaon is a prominent suburb of India's capital city New Delhi. The city has seen exponential population growth in the last decade (73.93 per cent between 2001 and 2011 as per the Census of India). A leading financial and industrial centre today, Gurgaon is home to over 250 Fortune 500 companies and was touted as the Millennium City by the state government in the early years of its development; however, that dream appears to have soured as the city comes under repeated criticism for inadequate infrastructure and poor planning and governance (Yardley, 2011).

The Making of an Exclusionary Urban Form

In contrast to the claimed success of Gurgaon and its label as Millennium City, Shubhra Gururani's hypothesis of Gurgaon's planning as an exercise in 'flexible planning' that 'accommodated the desires of the wealthy and political elites' captures the essence of most critiques of Gurgaon's development model (Gururani, 2013).

Historically, several factors paved the way for Gurgaon's rapid urbanization. First, the creation of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1962 and the enforcement of the Delhi Master Plan pushed private colonizers and developers out; they started to develop land in the surrounding states. Second, the Punjab Scheduled Roads and Controlled Areas Restriction of Unregulated Developments Act, 1963 came into force and allowed the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) to selectively develop certain areas. Even though the Government of Haryana initially bypassed Gurgaon for urbanization in favour of Faridabad owing to water shortages, private developers like the DLF eventually used political connections to manipulate the boundaries of these areas in return for permissions to acquire lands from farmers in Gurgaon.

Gururani's paper is rife with extracts from fieldwork interviews with local farmers, bureaucrats and politicians. Field interviews with landlords for this article confirm the informal nature of tenure agreements between landowners and developers and anecdotal evidence emerged of the 'buying' of *gram sabha* land via the corrupt *sarpanch*, resulting in court cases that were surreptitiously settled out of court and the practice of long-term lease agreements with developers that continue to yield huge monthly incomes to landowning families. The 1975 Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Area Act officially allowed private developers to pay the government a fee to be permitted to develop colonies; powerful real estate groups often ending up reworking the Master Plan time and again to suit their ends (Gururani, 2013). In 1981, licences were granted to develop 1,200 acres for the Maruti factory as well as to DLF to develop private colonies. This set a precedent for many other such private enclaves of real estate development in the city.

Gurgaon remained under a municipal council until 2008, allowing the chief minister to take decisions directly, thus developers with access to the right high-level politicians were able to do as they pleased. The Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon was incorporated as late as 2008 and councillors elected only in 2011. Democratic processes are therefore very new to Gurgaon and it is early to determine how they will shape the city. At present, candidates from the urban villages of the city are most active in the political sphere and middle-class activism is slowly rising; however, the rights of migrant workers are not a priority for any powerful stakeholders (interview with councillor Ward 30).

What emerges out of the flexible planning process is a deeply divided city. Through the processes of deregulation (by permitting developers to deeply influence planning processes), the state has created an urban form in which planned gated developments house the elite, while villagers and poor migrants live in relatively high-density informal areas, usually urban villages and unauthorized colonies, tucked into interstitial spaces and hidden away from the glitzy areas of the Millennium City.

The 'Uncounted' Working Poor

Informal estimates place the number of migrant workers in the Gurgaon urban agglomeration at 1 million people (Agrasar, 2013). This is in addition to the 1.5 million people officially counted in the Census 2011. Usually, official census figures do not properly and distinctly enumerate migrant populations (UNESCO, 2012).

The Agrasar (2013) survey highlights that low-income migrant workers in Gurgaon are unskilled (53 per cent), performing jobs, such as, contract labourers, cleaners and security guards and doing more entrepreneurial work, such as, domestic work, rickshaw pulling and street vending. Another 43 per cent are semi-skilled, mostly doing entrepreneurial work as auto/tempo drivers, shopkeepers, electricians and plumbers but also working in offices performing low-level sales, accounting and human resources roles. The survey found that migrant renters lived in substandard conditions; 72 per cent of migrants shared toilets, for instance. It also highlights that cultural norms associated to communities of origin have impacts on a household's potential to earn in a city; participation of women in the workforce, for instance, differs vastly across communities.

The survey also documents the distribution of migrant workers across the city and maps the proximity of densely populated informal areas with hubs of commercial activity (Figure 1). Further, it identifies and describes the main clusters where migrant workers are concentrated in the city and links the type of migrants to the jobs that are on offer nearby. For example, migrant men in Kapashera village are likely to work in the garment factories of Udyog Vihar, while those in Chakkarpur are likely to be rickshaw or auto drivers (Table 1).

In this scenario, informal rental housing is both a site for domination (of the migrant tenant by the local landlord) and an important source of income for resident villagers. These are the sites where the clash of identities or the processes of assimilation, if any, play out. These are the spaces where aspiration remains a dream or becomes a reality.

Informal Rental Housing Typologies and Landlordism in Gurgaon

Below is the author's analysis of informal rental typologies in the city. The analysis presents each typology in the context of the profile of the tenants, location and tenurial conditions, the rental system that is in operation and the quality of housing and living conditions of tenants (Table 2).

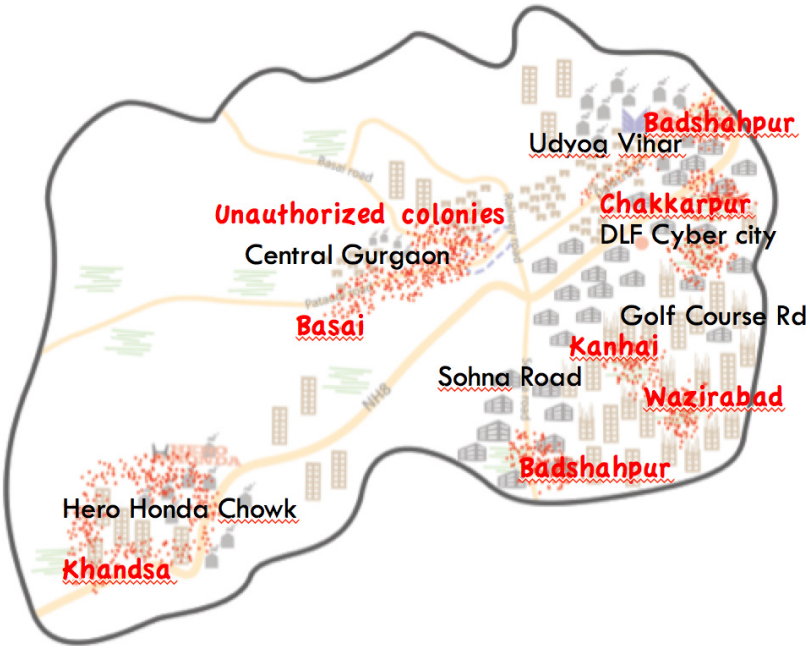

Figure 1. Distribution of Migrant Tenants Across City

Descriptive caption: Urban villages and unauthorized colonies where informal renters live are well distributed across Gurgaon and close to centres of employment.
Source: Agrasar.

Table 1. Characteristics of Migrant Populations in the Main Clusters of Informal Housing

	Total Population	Migrant Population	Dominant Group	Occupation: Men	Occupation: Women
Gurgaon Central	200,000	120,000 (60%)	Bihar, UP	Factory workers, Drivers, Entrepreneurs	Homemakers, Domestic workers, Labourers, Home-based Jobs
Kapasehra cluster	150,000	100,000 (70%)	UP, Bihar	Export Companies, Drivers	Export Co
Nathupur, Sikanderpur	200,000	160,000 (80%)	Bengalis	Labour, Housekeeping, Rickshaw pullers, Security guards, Vendors	Domestic work, housekeeping
Chakkarpur	40,000	36,000 (90%)	Bengalis	Rickshaw, Auto Drivers	Domestic workers
Badshahpur	80,000	48,000 (60%)	Bengalis	Drivers, Labourers, Housekeeping	Housekeeping, Domestic workers
Wazirabad, Silokhra, Kanhai	50,000	30,000 (60%)	Bengalis	Drivers, Labourers, Housekeeping	Housekeeping, Domestic workers

Source: Agrasar.

Table 2. Typologies of informal Rentals in Gurgaon

Typology	Tenure	Location in Village	Rental Range	Occupation of Migrant	Sanitation/Shelter Condition
Jhuggis OR Semi-permanent single-floor tenements	Tenant or contractor built on private land or on gram sabha land captured by local strongmen	Periphery	₹700–1500	Informal-waste collection, fruit/ vegetable vendors (*rediwalas*), cleaners, riksha pullers, etc	Brick walls, semi-permanent roofing- tin/ AC sheets, toilet shared among 10–20 HH, open bathing
Permanent multi-story pukka tenements	Landlord-built on pvt. land	Intermediate zone	₹1800–2200	Informal/Semi-formal- drivers, security guards, semi-skilled construction workers, factory workers,	Brick walls, roof slab either of T-iron sections with stone slabs in older buildings or RCC; toilets baths shared by 8–15 HH
Pukka rooms with shared toilets	Landlord-built on private land	Inside village/colony	₹1500–3000		Poor light, ventilation, 5–6 families share toilet/ baths, baths often open areas, maintenance lvl varies
Pukka rooms with separate toilet	Landlord-built on private land		₹3000–6500	Same as above, been in Gurgaon longer, higher job security, better conditions back home, etc.	Poor light, ventilation, 5–6 families share toilet/ baths, enclosed baths and toilets

Source: Author.

Jhuggis/*Semi-permanent Single-Floor Tenements*

Migrant Profile

Single male migrants as well as families from UP, Bihar and other states live in these *jhuggis* and tenements, but Bengali Muslims are the dominant community (Figure 2). Typical livelihoods are waste collection and sorting, domestic help, rickshaw pulling and vending.

Location and Tenure

Jhuggis are at the very bottom of the rental housing market and are spread all over Gurgaon in interstitial spaces between planned colonies. They also exist at the peripheries of urban villages and unauthorized colonies on privately owned land. In urban villages, many landowners who are waiting for the right opportunity to develop their land for more profitable real estate projects use vacant lots to construct temporary shelters for rental purposes. The land may also be already leased out to a corporation for future for commercial purposes; however, developers permit the temporary use of the land for parking or for *jhuggi*-type rentals to the landowners. *Jhuggi*-type rentals can also be found on *gram sabha* lands (the village commons) that have been captured illegally by strongmen, usually politically affiliated villagers.

Outside the unauthorized colonies in Central Gurgaon, the ragpicking and *kabaadi* communities pay rent for a piece of private land where they can collect and sort waste. Around the sorting site, they build low-height shacks in which they live, often with their families who also help in sorting the waste.

Management of Rentals

Though in some cases, they may lease out tiny pieces of land to poor households, on which the tenants build their own shacks, landowners often manage rentals directly after getting them built by a contractor. What is also prevalent is a system in which a contractor builds *jhuggis* on private lands and rents these out to migrant workers. He is also responsible for collecting the rent and is allowed to keep a percentage before passing it back to the landowner.

This system is more prevalent among migrant workers from West Bengal, who work in poorly paid jobs, such as, waste sorting, domestic work, cleaners and security guards. Severely disadvantaged by the barrier of language—most of them only speak Bengali—they rely on the contractor for not only housing but also a whole host of services, such as, water, sanitation, security of their children and belongings when they are away at work, ticketing to return home and even job placements. 'Contractors' in this scenario are usually older migrants also from West Bengal.

Housing Quality and Living Conditions

The sizes of these clusters range from about 10 huts to 100 huts. They are usually built of bamboo frames with a host of temporary materials used as walling and roofing material. Old *saris*, plastic, thermocol and thatch sheets are used for walls, while tarpaulin, aluminium and tin sheets are used for roofing. The structures are flammable and frequent fires break out in the dry summer months, destroying these settlements within minutes. An upgraded form of single-storey tenements are made of unplastered brick and the roof of corrugated tin or asbestos-cement sheets weighed down by stones and bricks.

The sanitation condition in these *jhuggis* is poor, with anywhere between 10 and 20 households sharing a single toilet. Bathing spaces are usually open areas where the landowner has provided a water connection and in many *jhuggis* where vacant land is still available, defecation is still in the open. Drinking water is also accessed from the same water connections and at times of extreme scarcity, tankers are sometimes arranged for which tenants often pay extra. *Jhuggis* do have metred electrical connections, though not individual ones and water and electricity are usually included in the rent charged.

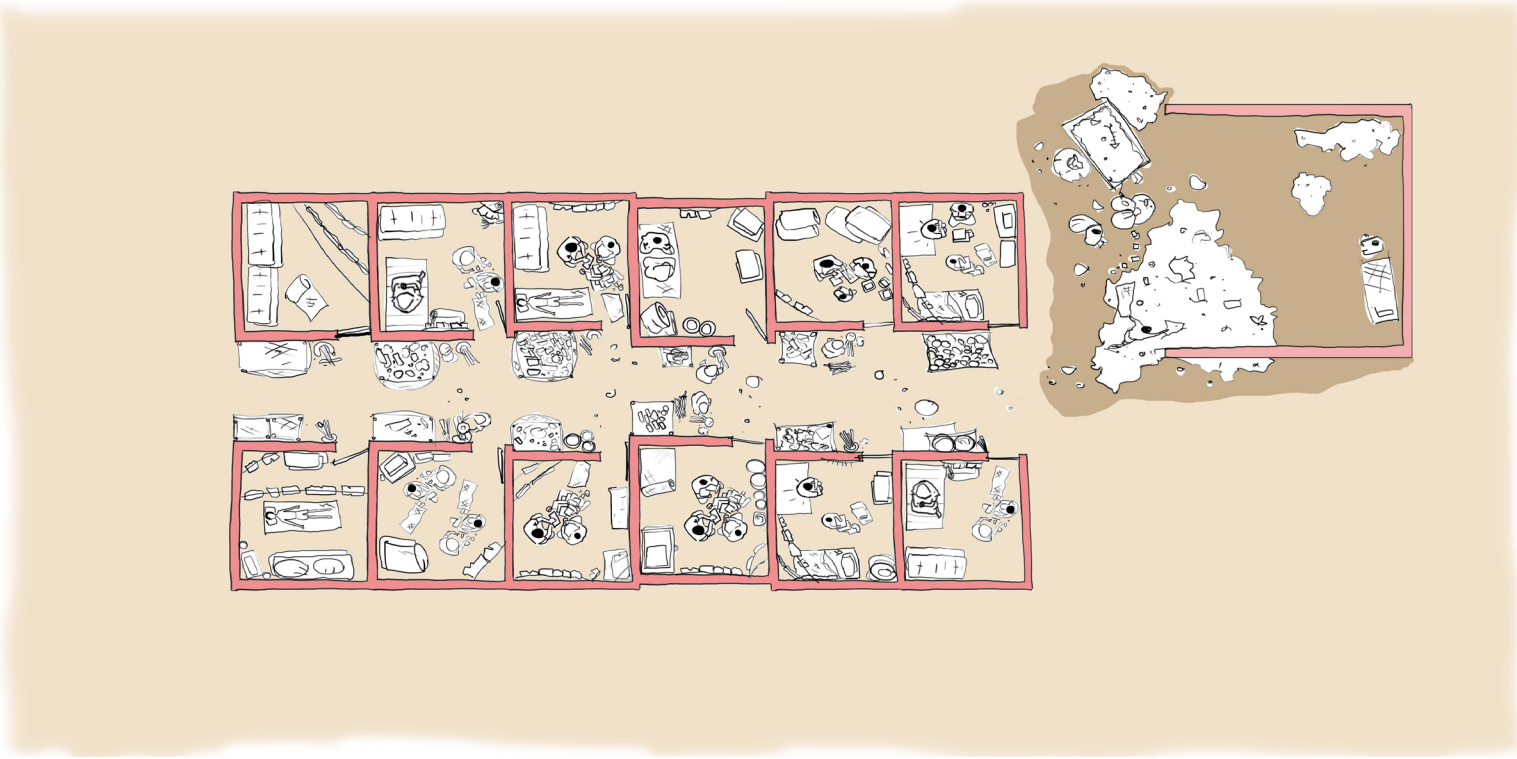

Figure 2. Plan of *Jhuggi*-type Rental Housing

Descriptive caption: Crowded conditions inside jhuggis means tenants live much of their lives outdoors
Source: Author.

Figure 3. Women Cooking Outside a *Jhuggi*
Source: Author.

Cooking is still largely done in earthen *chulhas* (stoves) over gas and cow dung fires. The *chulhas* are usually located outside the huts. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) connections are unavailable to these migrant workers owing to lack of address proof and illegal LPG cylinders being too expensive.

Life for women is hard and a strong sense of community and coordination is required for families to be able to share meagre resources on a daily basis. Yet, in *jhuggis* where migrants from various states live together, this coordination becomes difficult as well and fights often break out, which the contractor needs to resolve (Figure 3).

Multi-storey Tenements

Migrant Profile

Originally built for single men to occupy, tenements now house a mix of single men living four to a room as well as unit families (Figures 4–6). Tenants are from diverse states or origin and comprise daily wage labourers, semi-skilled contract workers and seasonal migrants.

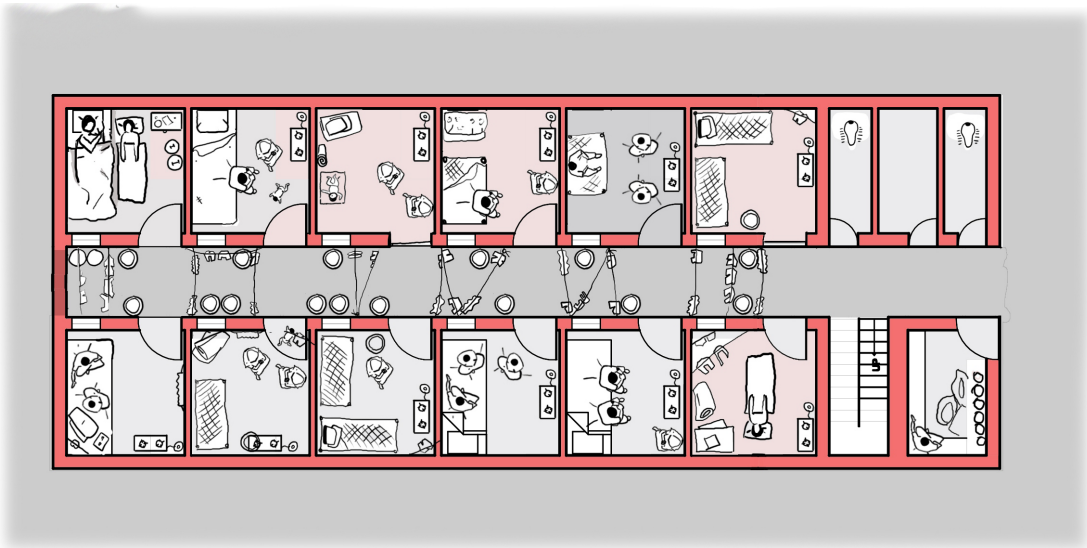

Figure 4. Plan of Tenement-type Rental Housing

Descriptive caption: Cooking is usually done inside poorly ventilated crowded rooms
Source: Author.

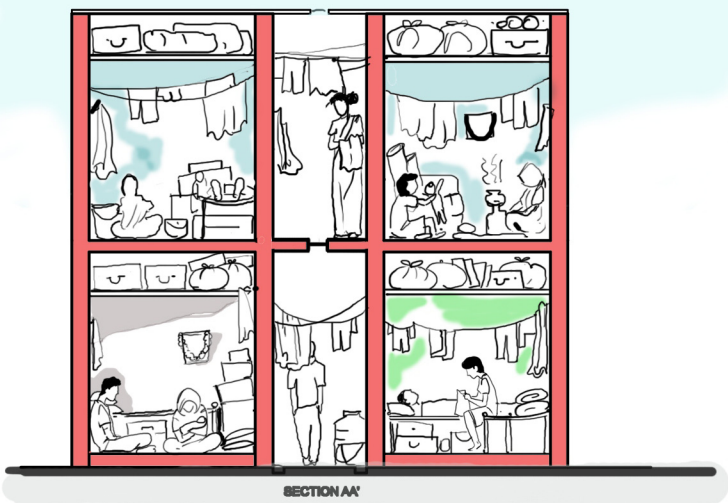

Figure 5. Sectional View of Tenement-type Rental Housing

Descriptive caption: As floors are added above, the lower floors are increasingly deprived of natural light
Source: Author.

Figure 6. Multi-storey Tenement-type Rental Housing in Nathupur Village

Descriptive caption: In the absence of building regulations in urban villages, landlords are rapidly developing empty lots into multi-storey tenements
Source: Author.

Location and Tenure

Two-storeyed tenements were built in Nathupur while the Cyber Citi offices were being built in adjacent DLF to accommodate an influx of migrant workers who would work in these offices and nearby residential areas.

Management of Rentals

These tenements come at a monthly rental of anywhere between INR 1800 and 2200 depending on the location, access and extent of crowding. They are usually operated and managed by petty-bourgeoisie or petty-capitalist landlords who actively manage the rental units directly or through close relatives.

Housing Quality and Living Conditions

The older tenements were built in brick and the roofing was typically iron T-sections with stone slab. Tenements range in size from 8 to 20 rooms per floor to over 25 rooms on a single floor. The more recent tenement buildings are four or five floors high and use brick and roller-compacted concrete (RCC) construction, including the placement of columns and beams in many cases.

Toilets and bathrooms are shared and landlords pay to get them cleaned once a day after which tenants are supposed to pitch in. Sanitation conditions worsen with the density of users per toilet. Cooking is

done on gas stoves within the rooms and in this sense, they are worse off than the *jhuggi* dwellers who can cook in the outdoors.

Courtyard-style Rooms

Migrant Profile

Typically, migrants from Bihar and UP occupy these rooms (Figures 7 and 8). Their wives do not usually work and culturally, families feel more comfortable when the womenfolk are in a situation where they interact with a controlled group of neighbours as opposed to a tenement situation. Surprisingly, migrants seemed all right with living with neighbours who belonged to different castes, states and even religion. The menfolk were away for long periods, most of them being in jobs where they work in 8-h or 12-h shifts. The women reported that they interacted with each other in the absence of their menfolk. Child care, budget planning, coordinating the common use of amenities, such as, bathrooms and water supply, became the binding factors, pushing aside conventional forms of division like caste and religion that they may have practiced in their villages.

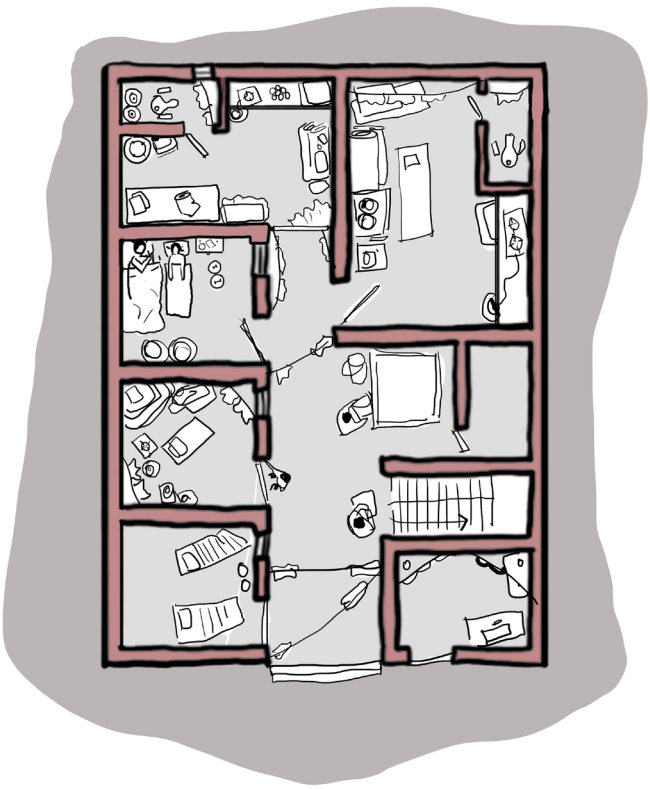

Figure 7. Plan of Courtyard-type Rental Housing

Descriptive caption: Homes opening onto a shared passage or courtyard offer a sense of safety and privacy
Source: Author.

Figure 8. Glimpse of a Room in Courtyard-style Informal Housing

Descriptive caption: Conversations happen in shared spaces outside a cluster of rooms
Source: Author.

Sometimes, these rooms are vertical or horizontal extensions of the landlord's home; however, the research did not establish this as a prevalent form. The researcher observes that this form of subsistence landlordism is being steadily replaced by more organized informal renting in Gurgaon.

Location and Tenure

Usually arranged around a courtyard or wide passage, these are rooms built to accommodate families. Typically, 6–10 rooms are built on each floor in the inner areas of urban villages as well as scattered across the unauthorized colonies usually on smaller plots.

Management of Rentals

These are usually created by subsistence landlords and exist as extensions of their own homes; however, petty-bourgeoisie landlords who own several plots across an urban village or unauthorized colony are not uncommon. Landlords are usually motivated by higher rents that are received from these tenants, who are looking for increased privacy and security for their families. The landlord collects the rents himself or sends a close relative. In urban villages, the landlord may live on the premises or in a separate home.

Housing Quality and Living Conditions

These are usually two-floor high brick and RCC constructions. Though the quality of materials in general is standard, aspects like flooring and plastering are usually substandard. Because toilets and bathrooms are shared among fewer families, living conditions are far better in this typology. Some rooms are even provided attached toilets and bathing spaces, but the light and ventilation to these is poor.

Landlordism in Gurgaon

The informal rental markets in Gurgaon's urban villages seem to have a few of the subsistence-type of landlords, but largely comprises of petty-bourgeoisie landlords who are operating a rental business on lands they already own. This is prevalent across typologies. However, rentals are often the major source

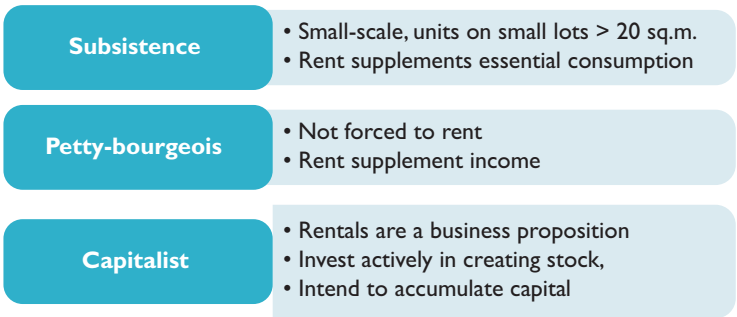

Figure 9. Types of Informal Landlords in Gurgaon
Source: Author.

of income for landlords and they feel under-confident about investing in any other type of income-generating activity. Therefore, as they bring more and more land into the ambit of the rental business, larger landowners seem to function more like capitalist landlords. In unauthorized colonies as well, most landlords are petty bourgeoisie who supplement their family income with money from rentals. However, because there has been an opportunity to buy plots in recent years, locals from nearby villages have bought plots as speculative investment and built rental housing on it. This could be seen as a form of petty-capitalist landlordism (Figure 9) practiced by absentee landlords.

Navigating the Complex Landscape of Informal Renting

Physical and environmental conditions are generally poor in informal rentals in Gurgaon. Poor light, inadequate ventilation, lack of sanitation and conditions of crowding are prominent points of concern. However, informal rental housing offers the obvious benefits of proximity to the workplace, affordability and flexibility to the working poor in Gurgaon. A rational analysis of informal rentals is frustrated by the low expectations that migrant renters have from housing, which they often consider a temporary circumstance in their lives. Their primary objective remains to earn higher incomes and therefore living in substandard conditions is viewed as a necessary compromise.

Every advantage that renting offers low-income tenants is linked with failures on the supply side, either on part of the city's infrastructure and governance or through the inability or unwillingness of landlords to invest in quality or basic amenities.

Proximity to Jobs and the Absence of Affordable Transport

Informal rental units in Gurgaon are almost exclusively located in urban villages (39 exist within municipal limits of Gurgaon) or unauthorized colonies (an estimated 150, with 50 slated to be regularized soon), which are essentially lands that retain their agriculture land use on paper, but have been illegally plotted out and sold using power of attorney slips.

Enclaves of informality are well distributed geographically across Gurgaon. The urban poor work in a wide range of jobs in the informal economy. Living as renters in urban villages and unauthorized colonies offers migrants proximity to their workplace. In a city where public transport is poor, saving on transportation costs and commute time is vital to low-income migrants. On the flip side, low-income

renters do not have the choice of living far away from their places of work. Family members must find work within the vicinity or go unemployed. This restriction negatively impacts their ability to leverage the opportunities for work in the city.

This is illustrated by the case of a respondent tenant household in Nathupur living in a courtyard-style room. The husband was a security guard at a corporate office and the wife had also been working as a security guard in the past but was currently out of service and looking for work. She reported being unable to take up a lucrative position in Central Gurgaon because of commuting costs. 'My son tells me I will have to pay INR 40 per day to travel back and forth; that does not make any sense,' she says. At the time of the interview, the wife had remained unemployed for a year in pursuit of a suitable job near their rented unit.

Flexibility and the Spectre of Exploitation

The working poor are engaged in a variety of jobs in the informal economy. These are insecure jobs, mostly without written contracts. Rentals offer them the flexibility to move locations when they change jobs. For seasonal migrants, the highly informal and flexible arrangements in informal renting allow them short rent terms so that they can leave for their villages and return with little pre-planning. A 25-year-old young man from Uttar Pradesh who lives in Devi Lal Colony and works as a construction labourer told me he stays in Gurgaon for about 9 months every year. 'I take back what I earn in 9 months and go home. When I return from my village, I usually get a room in the same place. The landlord does not charge me for the months I am in the village,' he says. Migrants also move accommodation seasonally to ensure the comfort of their families.

On the flip side, migrants also move because they face exploitation by landlords. Several respondents reported that they felt the need to move because they were being forced to buy rations at higher prices from grocery stores owned by their landlord. A young woman reported that constant monitoring of her movements by the landlord and his family made her uncomfortable and she urged her family to move to a rental accommodation located elsewhere.

Affordability in the Context of Crowding and in Sanitary Conditions

Informal rentals are affordable for migrants. The majority of respondents pay well below 30 per cent of their household income towards rent, if that is taken as the norm for affordability. With multiple earning members of the family and a predominantly economic motivation towards migration, migrant workers are able to comfortably (Figure 10) afford rental housing.

Some studies on low-income rentals have suggested that 15 per cent is a more realistic cut-off for rentals (Osborne, 2012). Given the fact that migrants end up paying more for food, LPG, education and health care because of their inability to access government subsidies, 30 per cent may be too generous a cut-off to evaluate rental affordability. It is well documented that the urban poor pay more in terms of rental per square metre than middle-income renters (Mahadevia & Gogoi, 2011); however, this is attributed to the extremely small size of the units that the poor inhabit.

Tenants in Gurgaon usually live in conditions of crowding inside these small-sized rental units. Using a measure that uses the World Health Organization's method to determine family size (where children below 1 year are not counted, children up to 10 years are counted as 0.5 persons, and all children above 10 are counted as a single adult), an International Red Cross standard considers any dwelling that offers

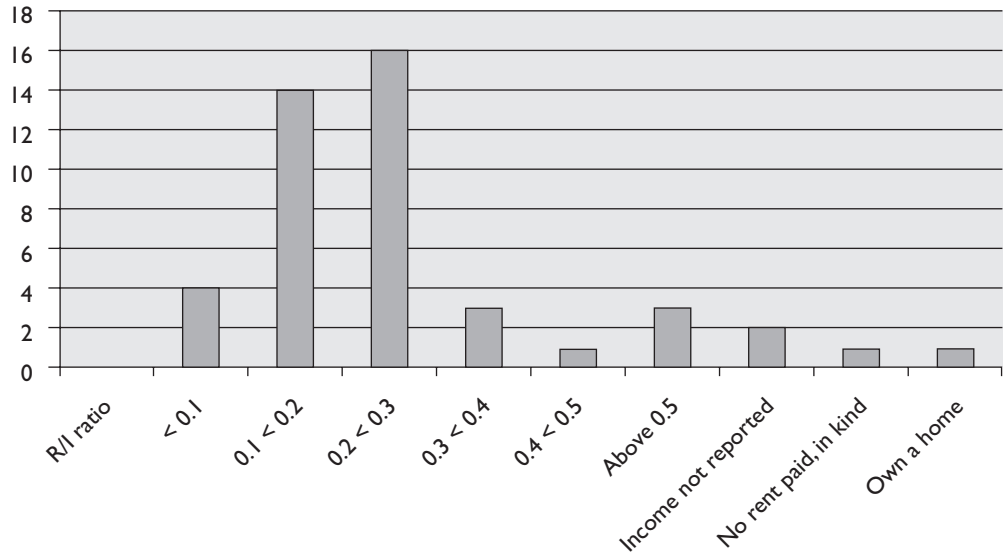

Figure 10. Affordability of Informal Rentals (rent by income ratio)

Descriptive caption: For the majority of low-income tenants, rentals are affordable by conventional norms
Source: Author.

less that 3.4 sq. m per person to be overcrowded. Among the 45 migrant worker households interviewed, over half (26) clearly lived in conditions of overcrowding with up to five family members sharing spaces as small as 8–10 sq. m (Figure 11).

Combined with factors, such as, poor access to sanitation, no separate cooking space and no drainage, it could be suggested that affordable rental housing available to migrant workers in Gurgaon is crowded and unhygienic, offering a low quality of life (Figure 12).

Dual Nature of Tenant–Landlord Relations

Migrants report cordial relationships with landlords, largely out of fear of reporting incidents of exploitation. Besides being forced to buy rations from the landlord's shop, migrants reported arbitrary increases in rent and occasional evictions as overt forms of exploitation. Subtler forms of aggression like imposed codes of conduct, especially on female tenants, were mentioned in the call-in shows aired on the community radio channel, *Gurgaon ki Awaz*.

Contrary to this, emerge stories of trust and benevolence. Tenants spoke of going to the landlord to solve interpersonal issues and in times of emergency. A pregnant migrant woman in Devi Lal Colony was confident her landlady would take care of her at the time of her delivery. Landlords were usually reported as cooperative in the context of permitting flexibility in their rental arrangements, allowing tenants to pay rents as per availability of funding and adjusting for periods of absence.

Landlords see their migrant tenants as powerless and pitiable, yet necessary for their business. While subsistence landlords develop closer relationships with tenants, capitalist landlords are more impersonal and business-like in their dealings. This dual relationship of fear and patronage characterizes the tenant–landlord relations in Gurgaon's informal private rental market.

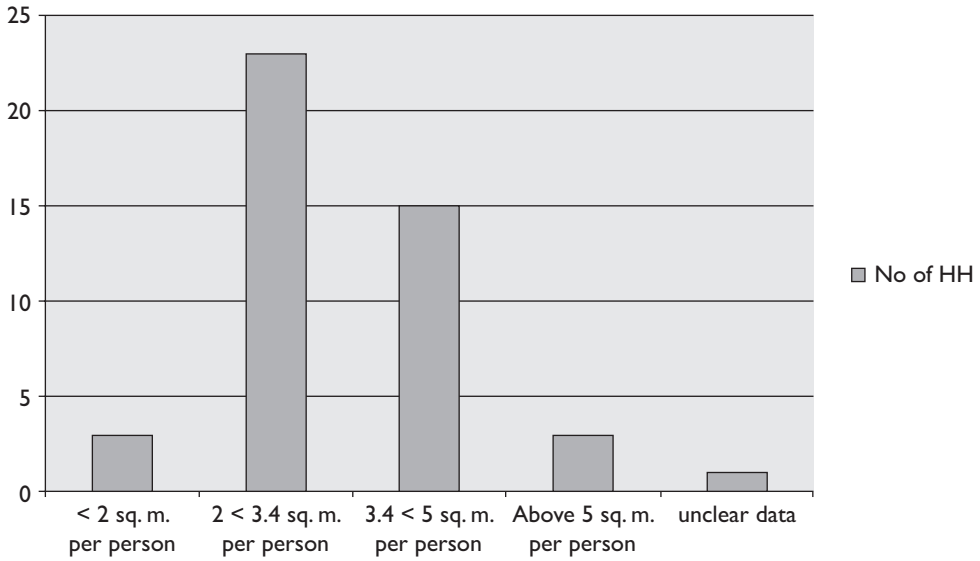

Figure 11. Crowding (square metres per person)

Descriptive caption: Well over half the respondent tenant households live in conditions of crowding
Source: Author.

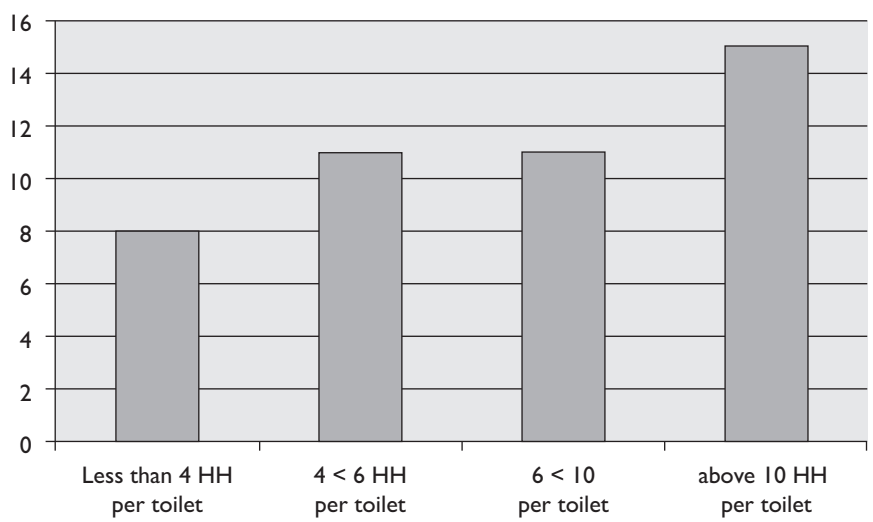

Figure 12. Access to Toilets (households per toilet)

Source: Author.

Factors Impacting Housing Choice and Mobility

Do we see mobility within the informal rentals market over the duration of time migrants spend in the city? The rational assumption that migrants earn more with time and upgrade to better located, less crowded housing does not strictly hold true.

Migration strategy, which is strongly driven by social networks, plays the most important role in determining housing choice among migrant tenants. For instance, families of unskilled Bengali migrants choose to live in *jhuggis* despite having household incomes sufficient to afford better-quality accommodation. They report the need to work together as a family to save money for life events like marriage and purchase of property in the village. Interviews with migrants from Bengal reveal the strong social networks that not only bring them to Gurgaon but also arrange for jobs and housing; moreover, they seem to find safety and comfort in living among their own.

Migrant families from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who usually live in tenements are driven by aspirations to move their children out of the cycle of poverty. Hence, they prioritize education, health and living conditions a little more than those who live in *jhuggis*. Migrants who opt to live in courtyard-style rental rooms have higher incomes, are better educated and aspire for a middle-class lifestyle. The respondent interviews revealed that migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar tended to live in these houses. Women members of their family rarely went out for paid work. Hence, they prioritize privacy and amenities. Location, cost, amount of space and landlord relations are also factors in choosing rental accommodation among migrants.

Conclusions

In Gurgaon, informal rental housing created by landlords in urban villages and unauthorized colonies is the de facto housing supply for the working poor, largely low-income migrants from other states in India. A wide range of these informal rentals exists including poorly constructed shanties (*jhuggis*), rooms arranged around a courtyard and multi-storey tenements. Tenants pay between INR 700 and INR 6500 to live in crowded, poorly lit and unventilated rooms.

The study finds that living in informal rental housing offers certain advantages to those who are poor and work in the informal economy. Informal rentals are affordable. They allow tenants to locate themselves close to their place of work as well as change locations whenever they need to. However, these advantages are called into question by the overall poor quality of the housing, poor sanitation, conditions of extreme crowding as well as experiences of exploitation and harassment by landlords.

The variety of informal rentals offers tenants considerable choice and respondent households did express the ambition to move to better housing. However, social networks and migration strategies play a larger role than rental prices and quality of housing and services in determining the typology and location of informal rental housing that a tenant household chooses to live in. For example, Muslim households from Bengal who were found to be poorly educated and unskilled tended to cluster into *jhuggis* despite having higher household incomes than migrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh that live in *pucca* tenements. While the former prioritized savings and remittances, the latter emphasized the need for spaces where non-earning women members would feel safe and get some privacy.

Informal rentals will continue to supply affordable housing to Gurgaon for some time; however, this supply is under threat from the onward march of real estate development in the city. As empty lots across the city are being developed, as village land goes into the hands of private developers through the negotiation of long-term lease contracts, and as unauthorized colonies get gentrified after the provision of municipal services, landlords will turn to more lucrative forms of informal renting. Already informal rentals in the shape of one-bedroom studio apartments are beginning to appear in Gurgaon's urban villages to cater to young educated workers in the city's call centres and technology firms; start-ups are taking up space inside villages too. Landlords are opting for more capitalist forms of production and building increasingly vertical tenements with more rooms. *Jhuggis* that accommodate

domestic workers are being pushed into the crevices and gorges of the Aravalli hills that flank the city, further out of sight.

Can the entrepreneurial energy of landlords who create and manage informal rentals be leveraged to secure and enhance this form of supply? Can tenants be empowered to make informed choices in this market to improve their access to jobs and services? How could the city create options for low-income home ownership to enable upward mobility among current occupants of informal rental housing? These are some of the questions that the study leaves us with.

Acknowledgement

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