

Abstract

‘Living with Others’ is an ethnographic study of everyday lives and health-seeking practices among urban poor living in a settlement in the margins of Delhi, India.

By exploring subjectivities, lived experiences of poverty, and relations through a prism of health, the inquiry aims to move beyond the explorations of precarity embedded in political economies and urban governance that dominate discussions on urban poor neighbourhoods in India.

Empirically, the study draws on long-term ethnographic fieldwork and interviews among urban poor, mostly women; and formal and informal health practitioners, abundant in the area. Among these are governmental interventions, run under a maternal health developmental programme, National Rural Health Mission.

The study argues that the vulnerabilities characterising the lives of the urban poor unfold and are negotiated through relations with kin, neighbours, and political patrons. Drawing on Levinas’ philosophy, which holds that subjects are relational and vulnerable to each other, and on the anthropology of relatedness and kinship, the study shows how ‘living with others’ entails both dependencies and care.

In this light, health-seeking practices among the urban poor are organized by community belonging and relatedness among neighbours and families. Concurrently, the study shows how the knowledge of relatedness informs governmental health interventions which problematize familial relations through evaluations of care in the families amidst poverty; and which functioned to sustain familial normality by acknowledging women’s vulnerabilities and dependencies on their kin.