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The Social Contribution of Malayalee Christians in Delhi During the Covid-19 Pandemic.

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ABSTRACT:

The COVID-19 pandemic turned life upside down for everyone, but for migrant workers and Affected communities in Delhi, the challenges were far greater than imagined. In the middle of all this, the Malayali Christian quietly became a source of support and hope among the community. This study looks into how they stepped up during those difficult times—not just through formal charity, but through genuine, community-driven efforts. To understand their contribution, a mix of methods was used: a simple Google Form survey to gather broad responses, along with personal conversations with church leaders who had been at the heart of the relief work. What came through clearly was that their faith, cultural identity, and the steady hand of church leadership played a big role in bringing people together and getting help where it was needed. Interestingly, around 80% of those who responded said they had provided financial help in some way. But it wasn't just about money—many were out there organizing food drives, helping with medical needs, or spreading awareness when confusion and misinformation were everywhere. The church naturally became more than just a place to pray; it turned into a sort of command center, where people found both guidance and practical help. Sure, there were plenty of hiccups along the way. Money was tight more often than not, and sometimes just figuring out who needed help—and how to actually get it to them—felt almost impossible. But even with all that, people didn't give up. What really kept them going was something simple: a shared sense of duty, their faith, and the basic belief that you don't turn away when your community is struggling. Looking back, one thing is clear—faith-based communities like this can make a huge difference when things fall apart. In big cities, where migrant workers often get overlooked, it's these kinds of local, people-driven efforts that step in and do what larger systems often can't—or don't—manage to do.

Keywords: Kerala, Christians, Covid-19 Pandemic, Assistance, Migrant workers, Church, community, NGO, Charity.

Introduction:

Kerala, otherwise known as "God's Own Country," is renowned for its natural beauty and cultural diversity, particularly religious tolerance and the rate of literacy. Among the large religious communities are Christians who form a well-settled and varied community with various denominations including Roman Catholics, Syrian Orthodox, Mar Thoma Syrians, Protestants, and Pentecostals. Formed as early as St. Thomas the Apostle in 52 AD, Kerala Christians have been significantly contributing to the growth of the state by way of education, medicine, and social reform efforts. They also have their own rich culture where Christian values intermingled with Malayalam language, local festivals, attire, and food. With time, most Malayali Christians have gone to other parts of India as well as foreign countries in order to get more education and job opportunities. They have formed prosperous communities in metropolises like Delhi that are clinging to culture and religion. These urban churches are home, cultural hubs, and centers of emotional support. Despite their adaptation to urban life, Malayali Christians hold on to their mother tongue, maintain customs, and retain their community culture. These institutions become home and a sense of belonging in foreign lands. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when India's unexpected lockdown stranded and exposed countless migrants, Malayali Christians in Delhi rose to the occasion. Driven by spirituality and moral obligation, they extended emergency relief—food, medical care, shelter, and psychological comfort—via their churches and social networks. Leaning on digital tools such as WhatsApp and church charity funds, they became frontline workers. This research captures their response, illustrating the role of religious groups as central players in city disaster response. It suggests that religious groups ought to be institutionally part of emergency planning since they bring credibility, urgency, and solidarity at a time of need.

Literature review:

Research on Malayalee Christians traces their origins to apostolic times (Maliakkal, n.d.) and details their growth through migration, colonial interference, and internal divisions (Thomas, 2012), (Jacob & Dube, 1977)). Syrian Christians preserved distinct religious identities while adapting to Kerala's culture, often showing caste-like traits ((Swiderski, 1988), (Frykenberg & Low, 2013)). Migration to urban areas like Delhi introduced new religious expressions (V., n.d.), influenced by socio-economic factors and urban ministry strategies. Migration studies ((Babu et al., 2017), (Bhagat & Keshri, 2020)) reveal hardships faced by internal migrants—housing, welfare access, and exclusion—amplified during COVID-19 ((Adhikari et al., 2020), (Jesline et al., 2021)). Kerala's welfare response stands out for inclusivity and anticipatory planning ((Peter et al., 2020), (Diwakar G. et al., 2022)), offering a model of migrant-sensitive governance. Christian theology also plays a role in addressing migrant challenges through solidarity and service (Benjamin, n.d.).

Altogether, these studies show how history, faith, and migration intersect in shaping the socio-religious lives of Malayalee Christians in contemporary India.

Another important contribution comes from (George, n.d.) who explores the intersection of religion, migration, and identity among Malayalee Christians living outside Kerala, particularly in urban centers like Delhi. George argues that migration has not led to a loss of identity; instead, it has prompted a re-articulation of what it means to be a Malayalee Christian in a non-native environment. Through interviews and community observations, the study shows how migrants have built churches, prayer groups, and cultural associations that serve not only as religious spaces but also as platforms for preserving Malayalam language, festivals, food habits, and kinship networks. The paper highlights the tension between integration into North Indian urban society and the need to maintain a distinct cultural-religious identity. These dynamics are shaped by generational differences, with younger members often more assimilated, while older generations prioritize cultural retention. George concludes that migration has reshaped, but not erased, the community's sense of self.

Methodology:

This research aims to examine the social contributions of Malayali Christians in Delhi during the COVID-19 pandemic by using a mixed-method approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative data. The study involved collecting responses through a structured Google Form and conducting interviews during direct visits to Kerala churches in Delhi. The Google Form helped gather statistical data from members of the church regarding their involvement in church-related relief efforts, types of assistance given (e.g., food, medicine, and money), and reasons, whereas interviews with priests and church volunteers provided greater insight into planning, implementation, and religious motives. The target population was Malayali Christians from various denominations, age groups, and both sexes, focusing on those who were directly engaged in or had knowledge of church-initiated relief activities. Ethical standards were adhered to at all times, maintaining confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntariness. Data analysis involved organizing survey responses in percentages and charts and thematically interpreting interview content, highlighting prominent themes like faith, leadership, coordination with NGOs, and operational challenges. Despite limitations such as limited access to some churches and lost responses, the methodology offered a balanced perspective of how this community mobilized in a crisis. By combining statistics with real stories, the study presents a justified and meaningful account of the resilience, sympathy, and social service contribution of the Malayali Christian community in response to a landmark public health disaster.

Data Analysis:

Personal Interview was conducted with Father K P Johnson who is the priest at St. Thomas Mar Thoma church, Karol Bagh, Delhi. He was not the priest of the church at the time of crisis but the church members Mr. Sabu M Iasow and Mr. Santosh Matthew who were present during the pandemic were able to give their experience and thoughts of the church's involvement. The personal interview is as follows:

During the covid -19 pandemic, what were the assistance given to the migrant workers from the church?

Initially church people could not find who the migrant workers in Delhi were as it was lockdown and everyone was not allowed to go out and work. They took the help of some NGO volunteers who have dealt with the migrant workers before. After meeting them, church workers understood that they have been struggling to eat food. So, one month ration along with food packets were also distributed for them. Most of them lost their jobs and houses and were staying in the slum areas of Delhi. Some of them left to their hometowns due to lack of job by the time church workers approached them. Among them ten families were diagnosed with covid-19 and the church workers took them to the hospital and got admitted them.

What was the project for helping the migrant workers in Delhi during the covid-19 pandemic?

A project from Karunyanidhi from which they distributed benevolence to poor people under church care. Karunyanidhi is a project which was started initially for helping widows but during the covid-19 pandemic they could not find enough funds for helping the poor people so they used the funds from the Karunyanidhi and they utilized it for helping the migrant workers and the poor people.

How many members from the church came to help the migrant workers during the covid-19 pandemic?

There were 45 members who came from the church to help the migrant workers and they were divided into different groups by area wise to cover the places where the migrant workers were living

Apart from distributing food packets were there any help given to the migrant workers?

Yes, they were given spiritual support by the Priest, hospital incentives, medical support, physical support by taking the migrant workers to hospitals, arranged ambulance services for them and even buried some of the deceased migrant workers in the cemetery.

What was the help got from the church people?

They came together for helping the migrant workers without any hesitation. From the start till the beginning, they assisted the priest and other volunteers.

What was the response got from the migrant workers after getting the help?

They do not look for any response.

Does the church have any collaboration with any NGO or any society?

The church does not have any collaboration, have their own social program called “Mar Thoma Social Action Samayapur”. They still help the people who are in need. Tuition, tailoring, beautician centre are some of the services provided by the church for the society.

Apart from the personal interview, google forms were also shared with the Malayalee Christians living in Delhi. The purpose of the google forms were to collect information about the assistance given by the church people to the migrant workers during the covid-19 pandemic. The below are the questions attached by keeping their names private.

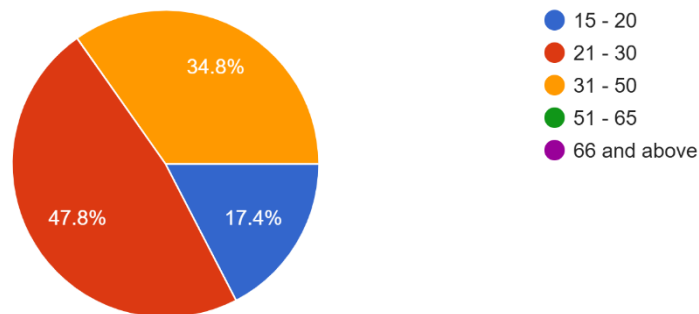


Figure 1: Age Distribution of Participants

In this survey 17.4% belong to 15 – 20 age group, 34.8% belong to 31 – 50 age group and 47.8% belong to 21 – 30 age group. Most of them are part of various church organisations and participated in various church charity events.

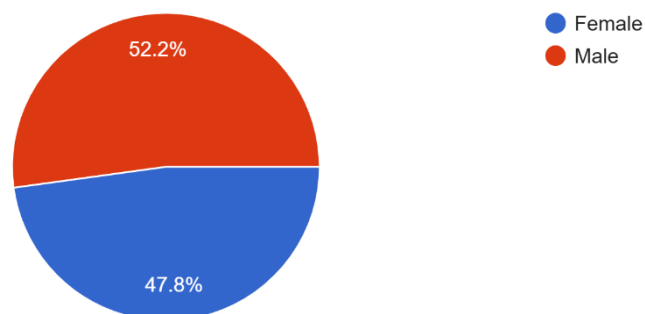


Figure 2: Gender Distribution of Participants.

In this survey, 52.2% are males and 47.85 are females. During the covid-19 pandemic they were very active and helped the migrant workers. The church guided people and the volunteers for helping the migrant workers and other people who are affected by covid-19. They coordinated works like distributing food packets and rations, taking the covid-19 affected patients to hospital, arranging ambulance services for them, and burying the deceased people in the cemetery.

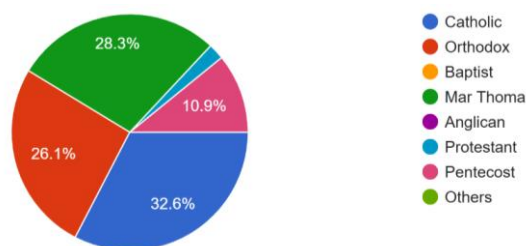


Figure 3: Which Christian denomination do you belong to?

In this survey, 32.6% are Catholics, 28.3% are Mar Thoma, 26.1% are Orthodox, 10.9% are Pentecost.

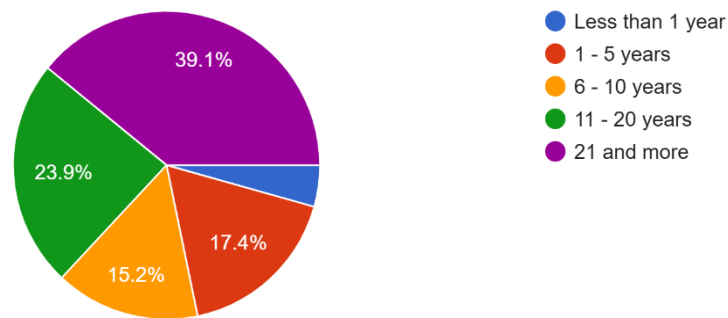


Figure 4: How long have you been living in Delhi?

In this survey, 39.1% are living in Delhi for 21 years and more, 23.9% are living for 11 -20 years, 17.4% are living for 1 -5 years and 15.2% are living for 6 – 10 years.

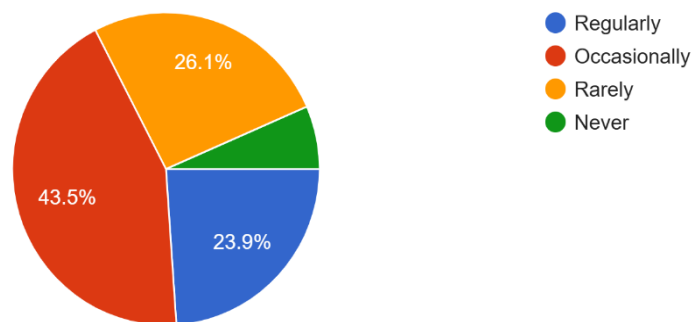


Figure 5: How often do you participate in church activities in Delhi?

The survey shows that participation in church activities differs among respondents. About 43.5% said they take part occasionally. Another 26.1% reported that they rarely attend church events or gatherings. In contrast, 23.9% said they attend regularly or are actively involved, showing a steady commitment to their religious practices.

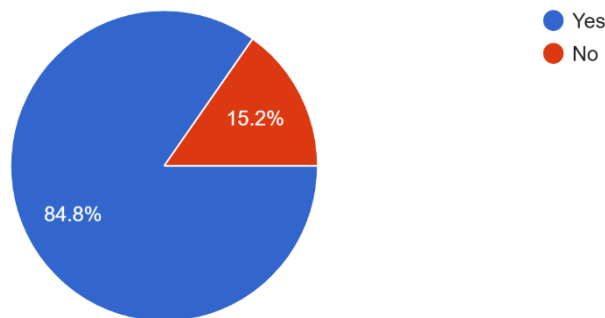


Figure 6: Do you speak Malayalam at home?

The survey reveals that 84.8% of respondents converse in Malayalam at home, which safeguards their cultural roots and native tongue. Families cling to Malayalam as a way to stay connected, allowing traditions to flow naturally to the next generation. In contrast, 15.2% forsake the use of Malayalam within their households. These individuals may direct the subtleties of mixed-language homes, while others embrace Delhi's diverse linguistic landscape or favor English and Hindi in everyday life. Language choice shows the balance between preserving culture and adapting to change. Malayalam still has a strong presence in most homes today.

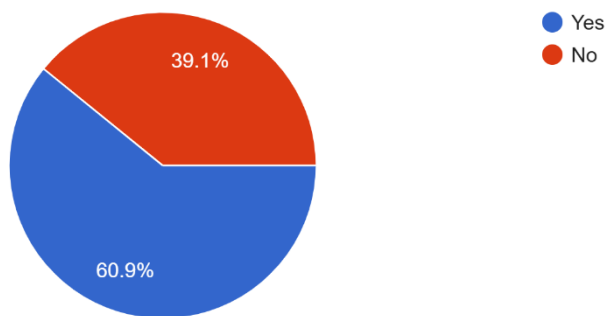


Figure 7: Have you joined any charitable organizations?

The survey shows that 60.9% people joined church groups, like ministries, or charity organization. This shows a strong connection to the church community. Among which 39.1% did not join any groups, the reasons could be lack of time or personal choice. This highlights different levels of involvement in church life. While many take part beyond regular worship, others limit their participation. The findings reveal a clear divide in community engagement, showing how personal circumstances and preferences shape involvement within church activities.

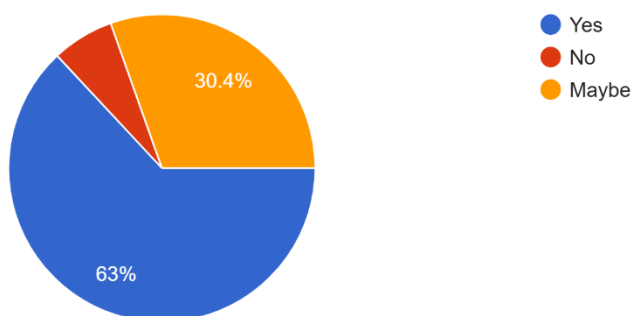


Figure 8: Does your church host any charitable events to support the Delhi community?

The survey shows that 63% of respondents said their church hosts charity events. These events support the Delhi community with food, education, and healthcare. This shows a strong commitment to social welfare. However, 30.4% were unsure if their church runs such activities. This suggests gaps in communication or awareness. Poor promotion may be a reason for this. While many churches provide community support, some members do not know about these efforts. The findings show both active service and weak communication. Better outreach could improve awareness and increase participation in church-led charity work.

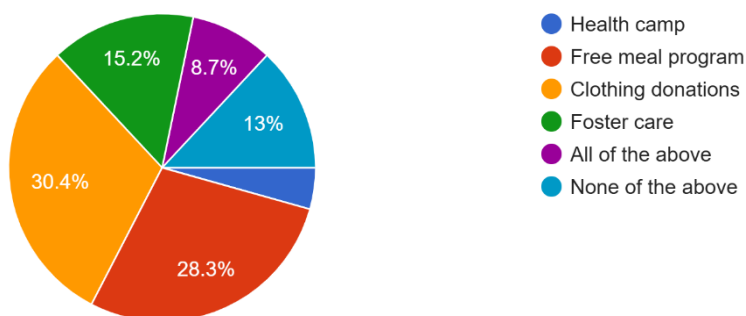


Figure 9: What sort of social events does the church host?

The survey shows the types of charity work by churches. 30.4% said their church organizes clothing drives to help those in need. Another 28.3% reported free meal programs to fight hunger. About 15.2% said their church supports foster care. However, 13% said their church offers none of these. This may be due to fewer resources or a different focus. Only 8.7% said their church provides all three services. These churches meet many community needs through wide-ranging support. The results show that while some churches offer targeted help, others take a broader approach to serving their communities.

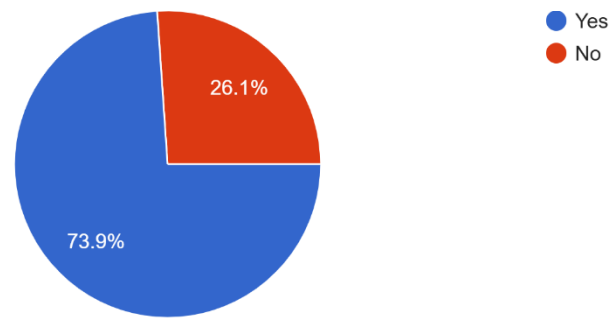


Figure 10: Were you aware of any Malayali Christian organizations that supported migrant workers during COVID or any known pandemic?

The survey shows 73.9% know about Malayali Christian groups that helped migrant workers during COVID-19. These groups provided food, medical aid, and financial support. Their efforts were visible and valued. However, 26.1% were unaware of this support. This may be due to limited outreach or lack of direct contact. The results show strong community action but also gaps in awareness.

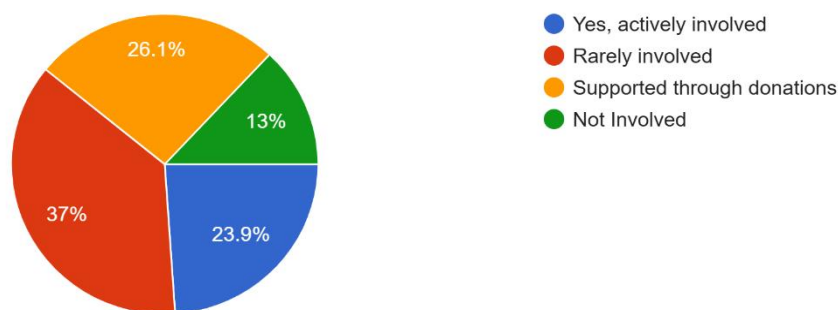


Figure 11: Did you personally participate in helping migrant workers or involved in any social activities during the pandemic?

- The survey shows 37% rarely helped migrant workers during the pandemic. They may have faced limits in time, resources, or awareness.
- About 26.1% supported through donations, offering money, food, or clothes. This group chose indirect help.
- Another 23.9% were actively involved. They joined efforts like food distribution, medical aid, or shelter. Their work shows strong community commitment.
- Lastly, 13% did not take part at all. This could be due to personal challenges or lack of information.
- The results highlight different levels of support and the barriers people faced during the crisis.

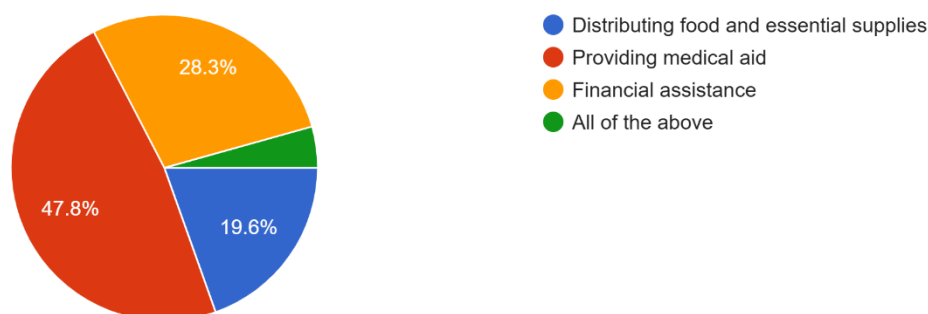


Figure 12: What are some of the contributions done by you or your organization to support during pandemic?

- The survey shows 47.8% provided medical aid. They helped with healthcare, medicines, and health camps. This reflects strong support during medical crises.
- About 28.3% gave financial help for basic needs and costs.
- Another 19.6% distributed food and essentials. These efforts met urgent community needs during tough times.

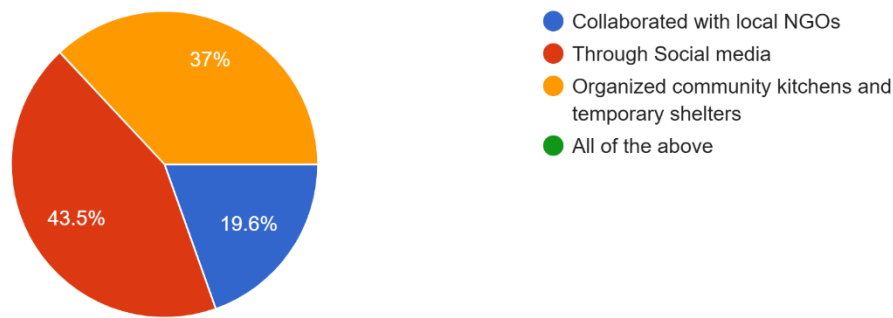


Figure 13: How did your church or community organization coordinate relief efforts?

- The survey shows 43.5% used social media for relief work, they organized awareness campaigns, sharing information, and connected volunteers across Delhi.
- Around 37% people set up community kitchens and shelters. They provided food and shelter for needy.
- And 19.6% worked with local NGOs to deliver emergency aid. These efforts show different ways people supported their communities.
- Some used digital tools, others took direct action, and many joined hands with NGOs.
- Together, they helped address food, shelter, and aid needs during the crisis. The results highlight how people used both technology and teamwork to reach vulnerable groups.

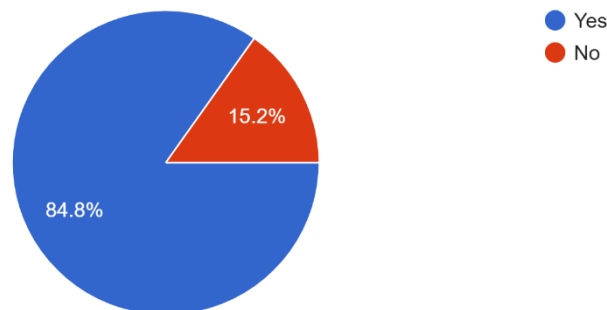


Figure 14: Did you or your church organize fundraising events for migrant workers support?

The survey shows that 84.8% helped organizing fundraising for migrant workers. Funds are raised through charity drives by the church, online campaigns, and events. The funds helped in providing the people with food, medical aid, transport, and shelter. This shows strong community support each other during emergencies. On the other hand, 15.2% did not take part. They may have faced difficulties in resources, or awareness. The results give the insight on both active involvement and the challenges faced by the individuals in joining these efforts. Overall, most people showed solidarity by helping migrant workers in need.

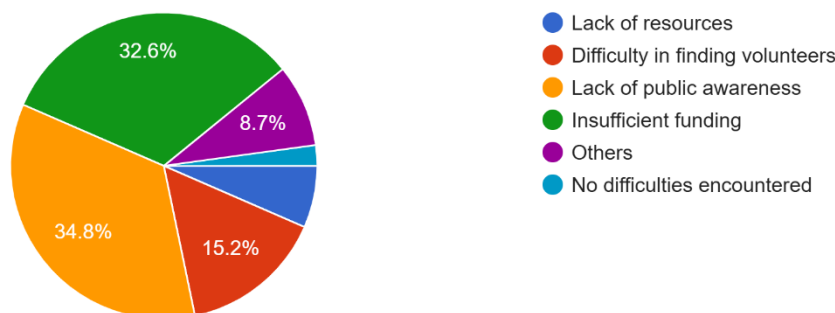


Figure 15: What difficulties do the church or Malayali Christians have when planning these events?

The survey results shed light on some of the challenges faced by individuals or organizations attempting to provide support during the crisis. According to the findings:

- The survey shows 34.8% faced low public awareness. The limited number of volunteers, donors, and beneficiaries. Poor outreach and communication with the other volunteers or beneficiaries were the key challenges during the COVID.
- Around 32.6% reported the lack of funds. Without money, the struggle to buy supplies or needs will be more.
- Another 15.2% found it hard to get volunteers. Health risks, restrictions, and personal duties made it harder. These issues reduced the impact of relief efforts.
- The results highlight key barriers like awareness, funding, and manpower. Overcoming these challenges is vital for effective community support during crises. Better planning and communication can improve future relief work.

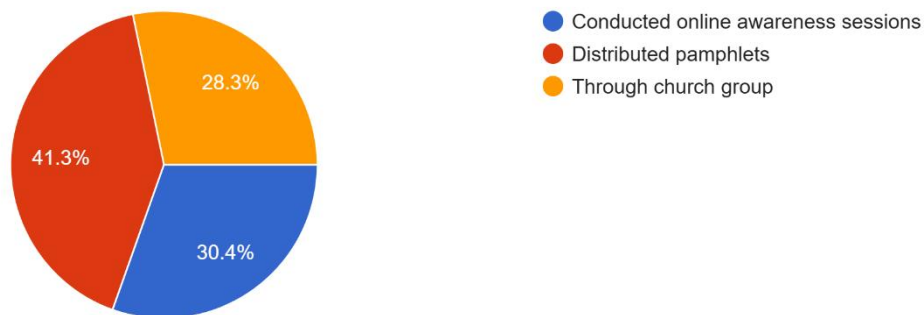


Figure 16: How was the awareness about COVID-19 safety measures spread?

Malayalee Christians in Delhi helped raise COVID-19 awareness. About 41.3% shared pamphlets with health guidelines and helpline numbers. The other 30.4% conducted online sessions on symptoms, vaccines, and mental health during difficult times. Around 28.3% used church groups to share updates through church online groups. They used both print and digital tools. These efforts spread correct information and supported public health. The community mixed tradition with technology to reach more people. Their actions promoted safety and unity during the crisis. The survey shows how faith networks became a strong force in fighting misinformation and guiding people.

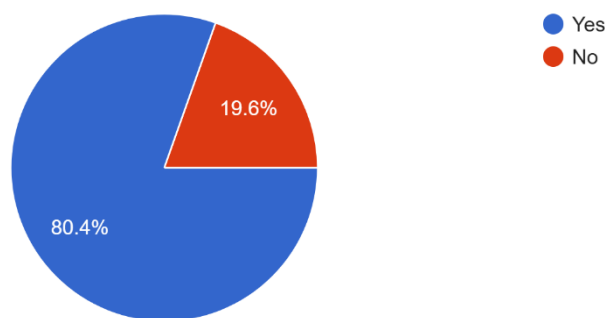


Figure 17: Did you or your organization provide financial aid to COVID victims or migrant workers or any others who are affected by COVID?

The survey shows 80.4% of Malayalee Christians gave financial support during COVID-19. Support went to victims, migrant workers, and families in need under the church. Help came through money transfers, church treasurer, and other funds. The Churches or the people in charge identified those who needs the support during the COVID and supported them through the church charity organization. The support from the church covered medical bills, food, and rent. Almost 19.6% could not support due to personal or financial restrictions. Many who couldn't donate still helped in other ways.

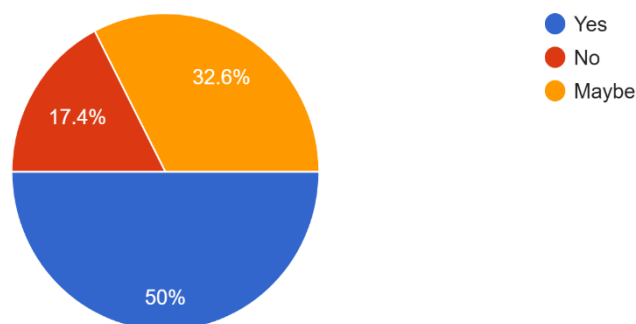


Figure 18: Do you think your personal faith influenced your involvement in relief efforts?

Around 50% people agreed that faith drove them to join the relief work. For them, helping others was a religious commitment. Almost 32.6% said maybe, believing their actions were influenced by faith, empathy, or social responsibility. And another 17.4% said no. They were driven by humanitarian or social responsibility. The results show that both faith and secular ideologies motivated people to act during the pandemic. Some followed religious beliefs, while others acted from personal or community concern. Together, that led for the strong support efforts by the community. The survey highlights how different values can inspire people to help in times of crisis.

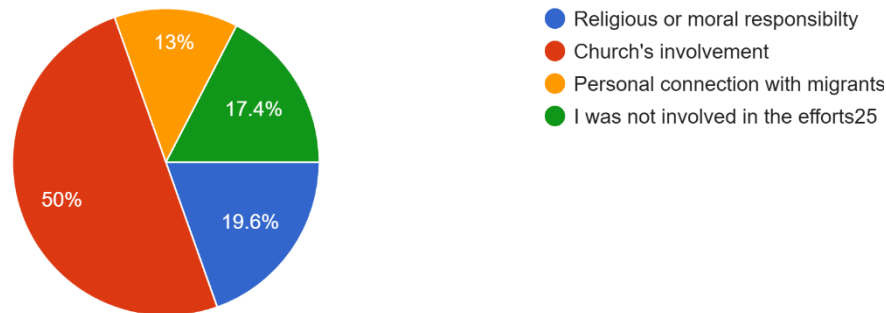


Figure 19: What was the main reason you got involved in helping during pandemic?

The study shows 50% of the people were influenced by the faith and the church involvement in their lives. About 19.6% were influenced by religious or moral responsibility. Another 13% helped due to personal ties with migrants. Around 17.4% did not take part, likely due to personal or health reasons. The results show that collective efforts, personal values, and direct connections motivated many to help during the crisis. The church played a key role, but individual beliefs and experiences also mattered. A smaller group could not engage, showing that participation depended on both motivation and circumstance.

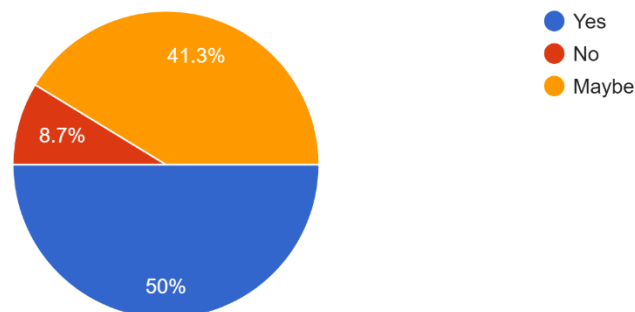


Figure 20: Do you think your church played a crucial role in support to take measures during pandemic?

The study shows that around 50% saw their church as active member in supporting affected families during the crisis. Churches organized relief, shared information online and gave support to them. And 41.3% are unsure of the church's full involvement. Another 8.7% said no, feeling the church did not contribute enough. The results show mixed views on church involvement during the pandemic, where some members agree on the involvement action, while others noticed little or were not sure about the participation. This shows the differences in how church efforts were perceived across communities during the pandemic. Visibility and communication among the church and its members played the crucial role in these mix opinions. Overall, many recognized the church's role, but gaps in awareness or action remained.

Conclusion

This research shows that Malayali Christians in Delhi provided essential support during the COVID-19 pandemic. They offered food, medicine, shelter, and also emotional and spiritual care. Most participants said they acted out of religious duty or followed church-led initiatives. The survey found that churches played a key role in organizing community help, while personal faith encouraged individuals to assist others. The study also finds that the community kept its cultural identity while helping those in need. They dealt with challenges like limited funds and low public awareness by using social media, personal networks, and church programs such as Karunyanidhi. Contributions from young people, women, and clergy strengthened their response. This research confirms that organized, value-driven religious communities can provide reliable support during crises. The efforts of Malayali Christians in Delhi show how faith-based groups can enhance social resilience and deliver timely help when formal systems may fall short.

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