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# MERC TIMES



**MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE  
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## COMMUNITY SPREAD EXPLAINED

Full  
Story on **P5**

INSIDE  
STORIES



Contemplation and  
Resilience Amidst the  
Pandemic  
**P04**



Floating vegetable market: A  
lifeline amid lockdown  
**P06**



Mammoth:  
Of tranquility And Serenity  
**P07**

## Meet 28-Year-Old Kangan Girl, The Sole Breadwinner Of Her Family

Sabreena Mir

Life without challenges is a life without desire. Year after year, strong, intelligent, determined women make their mark in varied fields. Masooda Rashid (28) grew up in an ordinary family in Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district.

Masooda did her bachelors in arts from GDC Kangan. She lost her father at a very young age. Not only did she support her mother in the household chores but also took up needle work to support her family financially.

Masooda started her own boutique 'Bump Thread', with products ranging from pashmina shawls, crochet and other fashion items.

"You do not have to be born with a silver spoon in your mouth to achieve great things in life- though it certainly works", said Masooda. "I went to government school and picked up pencil, learned how to read and write. I went through periods of intense struggle from childhood to become the person I am today", she added.

"My classmates mocked me for being a poor kid. But there was an energy in me that made me say, I will work hard and get things done on my own", she further added.

"I got inspired by a lot of women who changed their lives by taking risks and making things happen. One day, I told my mother that I want to open a boutique. At first, she disagreed because of my family's financial struggles but then came around", Masooda added.

Abdul Hameed, Masooda's neighbour said, "She overcame hurdles to show her merit. There was a time when her mother was forced to work for rupees fifty per day. Her daughter today earns over three lakh per year. She is an inspiration to many."

"I lost my husband several years ago and I did not have a son who could work and make money for us. I was not able to pay expenses of my family. There was no one to help me or support me", said Masooda's mother. "I still remember, when my daughter was thrown out of school because she did not have a notebook. But times have changed, my daughter has become an example today", added Hajra Bano.

I got inspired by a lot of women who changed their lives by taking risks and making things happen. One day, I told my mother that I want to open a boutique. At first, she disagreed because of my family's financial struggles but then came around

## Students Struggle With 2G as Classes Move Online



Aaqib Naseem

For the past one year, schooling has taken a big hit in Kashmir valley. Students have been able to attend school for a total of two weeks. Having faced two continuous lockdowns since August Last year, education in the valley seems to have taken a back seat.

To compensate for this loss, the government came up with the idea of online classes in the valley. What initially seemed like a ray of hope for students suddenly looks burdensome. Poor internet and lack of accessibility of smartphones have only added to their woes.

Hanan Shafi, a 5th grade student from Humpora village of Kupwara District, now a full-time shepherd said, "They serve buffering in the name of online classes. They should first fix 4G network. When I didn't find online classes productive and there was no other source for me to study, I started grazing my cattle in the meadows of my village." Notably, Hanan is a topper of his class. It's not just the story of Hanan. Twelve other kids accompanying him in the meadows with their cattle narrated the same story.

Mohammad Shafi Mir, a father of two daughters said, "My children are unable to attend the classes online. I have a simple keypad phone. I cannot afford a smart phone. I am anxious about their future. Online classes are for elites."

Iqbal Rasool Mir, acting magistrate of tehsil Kralgund said, "We have no choice other than online classes on 2G internet even though low speed doesn't allow us to explain things properly.

Government is trying to provide smartphones to students who cannot afford them but we have not succeeded yet."



## Pulitzer Awards For Kashmiris For Lockdown Coverage

Sayima Ahmad

Breaking the stereotypes, people of Kashmir are making headlines throughout the world. Utilizing their skills and realizing their talents, men and women, young and old, Kashmiris are pushing forward in various fields across the globe.

Being a journalist in Kashmir is a daunting task. Lack of communication and internet in the shadow of conflict makes it a hazardous job. But surviving these odds are journalists like Masrat Zahra, Dar Yasin, Mukhtar Khan and Channi Anand who have written their names in history. Masrat Zahra was named the winner of the Anja Niedringhaus Courage award by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). The award is named after a German photojournalist killed in 2014, in

Afghanistan. "I got my award for my work, not for sitting at home. It is my journalistic work," said Zahra while talking to SabRang India. "There are many untold stories not yet known to the non-locals. I want to tell them. I will not stop", added Zahra.

Dar Yasin, Mukhtar Khan and Channi Anand – three journalists of the Associated Press won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography of the Kashmir clampdown. While talking to The Wire, AP President Gary Pruitt said, "To capture the photos, the journalists regularly fled both security forces and angry crowds – sometimes hiding in the homes of strangers - as they looked for ways to illustrate daily life."

"We are proud of the work done by Dar, Mukhtar and Channi. Their skill, bravery and ingenuity in the face of numerous obstacles provided the world an insight into the extraordinary situation in Kashmir.

Their commitment to telling this story is profound," said AP senior vice-president, and executive editor, Sally Buzbee.

Not much of the Kashmiri culture is known abroad. Besides the Shikara, the Houseboat or the Kashmiri shawl, a foreigner cannot relate to the valley's intrinsic culture by any other means. This discontinuity stems from the lack of its promotion in the modern multicultural societies of the world. However, a Kashmiri couple, Dr Khurshid Guru and his wife Dr Lubna, residing in the US have endeavoured to tackle this by buying a 97-year old church in Niagara Falls and convert it into a museum. "The couple will convert the place into museum of Kashmir art, culture and history which will have over 1,500 paintings, books and artefacts of Kashmir collected over the years by the couple", sources close to the family said.

## Covid-19 lockdown: A hotbed for domestic abuse

Azmat Maqbool

There has been an alarming rise in the domestic violence cases throughout the world during this pandemic. Financial insecurity, mental stress and uncertainty has fuelled aggression in homes. Due to the pandemic, many victims find themselves trapped with violent partners without access to resources, friends or family networks. As stated by the French Secretary of Equality Marlene

Schiappa, "confinement is a breeding ground for domestic abuse."

Many women face verbal and physical abuse even in normal hours but the lockdown has further exacerbated the situation. UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) research found that 'domestic abuse' and 'domestic violence' were terms whose search frequency on google increased significantly in the middle of March and reached peak on April 19 and May 10 in India. 1,477 complaints of domestic violence were filed by women between March 25 and May 31, in 2020. This 68-day period recorded more complaints than the number of complaints received between March and May in the last 10 years.

Almost 57% of women in India are not having access to phone, their options to file complaints under lockdown are now limited. "In a country like India, it's not easy for women to come out and report," says Nayreen Daruwalla of Sneha, an NGO that runs a crisis helpline for survivors of domestic violence.



According to NCW Chairperson Rekha Sharma, complaints were received largely by email during the latter period. The Childline India, an NGO received more than 92,000 calls between 20-31 March at the start of India's lockdown asking for protection from abuse and violence. The extended confinement has also trapped children with their abusers at home.

"The abuser feels frustrated and angry because of lack of control due to the constraints imposed by lockdown," says Ashwini Deshpande, an economist and a professor at Ashoka University. "This prompts him to exercise greater control by abusing his partner and/ or children, often with violence."



# Contemplation and Resilience Amidst the Pandemic



In an interview to Minhaj Masoodi, Wasim Rashid Kakroo, a clinical psychologist at IMHANS (Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences) Srinagar, discusses the effects of pandemic on the mental health of the children and ways to cope with it.

The emergence of Corona Virus has wreaked havoc world over. It has devoured economies, crippled health systems and sent the world order into total disarray. While the experts have focused all their energy on tackling the virus, very little attention has been given to the affect it has had on mental health of people, particularly children. It has disrupted the lifestyle and forced changes in behaviour of people.

**Q: How much has pandemic affected mental health of the children?**

A: We, as clinicians divide children into three sub groups; those who are normal, those who have some sort of mental health issue/disorder and those who don't have any issue but are vulnerable. Since schooling has been one of the biggest casualties of the pandemic, children find themselves stuck at home. Schooling used to give structure to their day. Since it's not there, children spend most of their time in front of their parents. So, if a child does something that would have been taken very lightly earlier garners unnecessary attention of the parent, which can cause friction between the child and the parents. Consequently, a child gets irritated and it can leave an ugly impression on psyche of the child.

For children who are already battling mental health issues like ADHD

(Attention Deficiency Hyperactivity Disorders), pandemic may further exacerbate the situation.

For the third group of children who don't have a mental issue but are vulnerable either because of genetic predisposition or the environment they live in, it may trigger an illness in their life.

**Q: What are the common signs that a child displays when he/she is facing a mental health issue?**

A: It varies from child to child but the common signs are he/she will become very pessimistic about life, may withdraw from parents or siblings, may even become touchy. Some even experience problems while sleeping or have trouble concentrating. Some complain of body ache or the child may even start bullying other children.

**Q: In absence of any medical help, how should a parent deal with his/her child in such situations?**

A: The frontal lobe of the brain is the part that deals with cognitive functions such as emotional expression, thinking, decision making. It basically shapes our personality. This lobe is not fully developed in children. So, a child is dependent on his/her elders to guide him/her. A child has no emotional or cognitive resources, no coping strategies. Parents should help their child in such circumstances by helping

them cultivate a hobby, try to connect them with their friends or engage them in some work. Parents should not judge their child, rather empathize with them and try to understand their behaviour and the cause behind it.

**Q: What importance does the parent's own mental health have during the whole process?**

A: Parents can respond to the emotional and psychological needs of their child only when they themselves are in good mental space. It is important for them to work on their own self first before they engage with their children. A child normally learns from the behaviour of their parents. So, if parents conduct themselves properly in front of their children, children will respond in a better way to their own problems. One way for parents to blow off their steam would be meditation or physical exercise. This lower the levels of stress to a good extent.

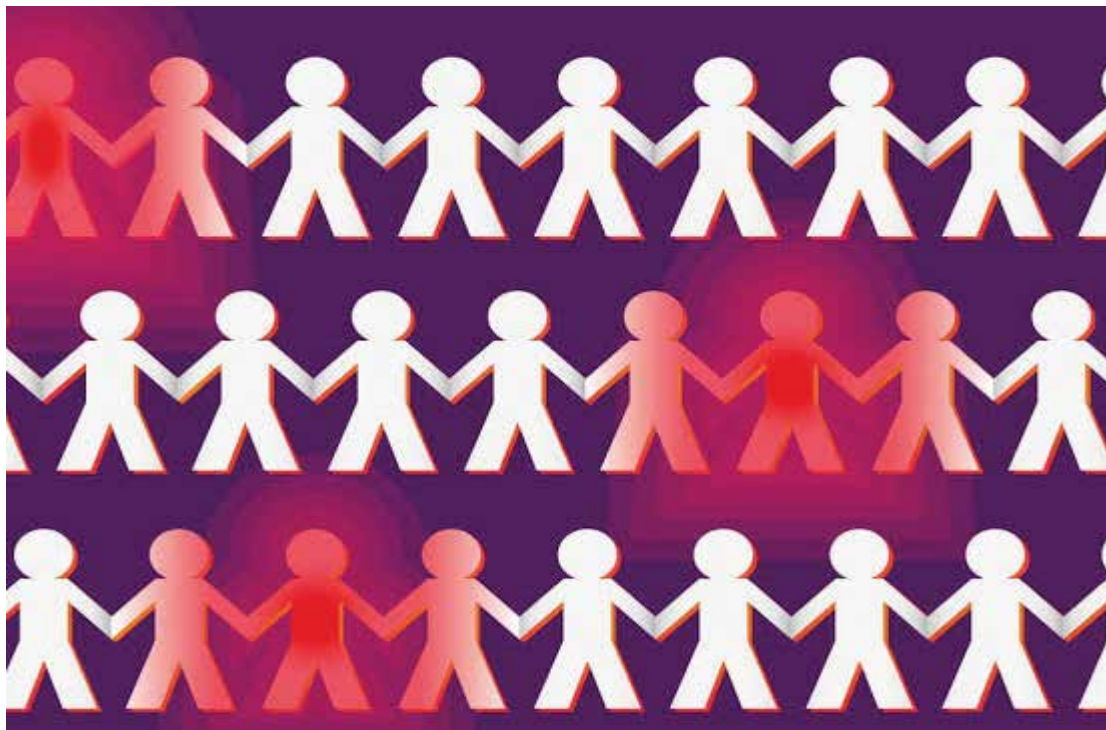
**Q: Do you receive any calls from parents about the behaviour of their children during these times?**

A: Yes, we get a lot of distress calls from the parents, particularly from those parents whose children suffer from ADHD. Since it is a disorder, we try to counsel and guide them on phone as much as we can but if the situation is grim, we advise them to come to hospital.



COMMUNITY SPREAD EXPLAINED

The Guardian



Ifra Mushtaq Moon

COVID-19 has crumbled the health systems world over. Even the most adept have struggled. Italy, United States, Britain, all came crumbling one after the other. The sheer number of patients who have been infected with the virus is mind boggling. The number of deaths is only growing with every passing day. Every day we hear from experts about chances of community spread.

Here, I've tried to explain to the readers what community spread is and what is its impact.

• What is community spread?

When an epidemic takes the form of a pandemic (i.e. a disease spreads globally), its spread usually takes place in three stages.

In the first stage, any person who has the history of travel to the affected region contracts the virus and brings it home to his/her country. In this stage, it is easy to trace the contacts of the infected person and isolate them as per protocol.

In the second stage, the virus starts transmitting locally which means transmission happens in a particular locality but the source of transmission is known. The route of the virus can be traced back to a single source.

In the third stage, the virus starts spreading in the community but the source or the cause of the virus is not known or traced.

As per WHO, "community transmission is evidenced by the inability to relate confirmed cases through the chains of transmission for a large number of cases." In simple terms, when one doesn't know how and where a person got infected, it's a case of community spread.

• Impact of Community spread:

The biggest casualty of the community spread is the healthcare infrastructure. When the disease enters the stage of community transmission, the first sector where stress is felt is the health sector

simply, because the number of patients increases rapidly and the healthcare system can

crumble under the weight of it, which can consequently lead to a huge number of deaths and maybe even unfold into a humanitarian crisis.

• Who can say whether a country or a region has entered the stage of community spread?

In India, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the apex medical body in India presided over by the Union Health Minister has the power to declare any region under "community spread."

In the United States, the CDC (Centre for Disease control and Prevention) is tasked with this job.

• Difference of opinion between ICMR and experts?

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has maintained that India is not in community transmission stage but warned that large portion of the Indian population remains vulnerable to COVID-19.

However, a lot of medical experts have urged caution saying India could already be in community transmission phase. The reason for lesser number of cases could be because of the lesser number of tests done and also due to the stringent testing protocols.

• Is Kashmir Valley in community spread phase?

Dr Ahangar, Director SKIMS, last month warned people that Kashmir valley has entered the community transmission phase. Government has already declared nine out of ten districts as red zones but is yet to officially declare valley under community transmission phase.

ICMR survey released last month said, nearly 98% people in the valley were susceptible to COVID-19 infections and only 2% showed signs of developing antibodies.



community transmission is evidenced by the inability to relate confirmed cases through the chains of transmission for a large number of cases



## One day cleanliness drive cum awareness programme held in Bandipora



**Sheikh Sehar**

A massive day long cleanliness drive cum environment awareness programme was conducted in the first week of July by Jammu and Kashmir Students Welfare Mission and Bandipora Eco Watch in collaboration with District Panchayat Officer, Elixir Garden School Aloosa and Alim Adab Aab Foundation at Ashtangoo, Bandipora.

A good number of people participated in the drive and collected solid waste, plastic and polythene bags and food wrappers. District Panchayat Officer, Bandipora, ensured proper disposal of the collected waste. Citizens of the village and other adjacent areas participated in the drive while taking all necessary precautions because of coronavirus and appreciated the initiative. They showed their optimism for such programmes to continue in future to get rid of plastic and polythene menace in the village.

Programme organisers during the session raised awareness regarding the use of plastics and its hazards. Emphasis was laid on scientific disposal of solid waste and a need for keeping the village free from open defecation.

To give a flip to the ongoing environmental activities and a push to conservation efforts for the safeguard and upkeep of the environment, Jammu and Kashmir Students Welfare Mission in collaboration with Wildlife Conservation Fund are running Go Green Bandipora campaign, Wullar Lake Conservation Project and Baba Shukur din Eco Restoration Project besides other plantation drives in District Bandipora to address the need for a healthy and green environment.



Pic: Musaib Iqbal

## Floating vegetable market: A lifeline amid lockdown

**Musaib Iqbal**

Srinagar city amid COVID-19 lockdown and frequent disruption of national highway has only one lifeline for fresh vegetables that is in the interiors of Dal Lake. Vegetable vendors from different parts of Dal Lake start their day at the crack of the dawn, around 60-70 boats gather at a point in the lake, locally known as 'Gudder' and start trading vegetables.

Floating vegetable market is a very old market in the interiors of the lake where the sale and the purchase of vegetables takes place. The sale takes place between 5 AM to 7 AM every day. Around 1250 acres of land along the dal lake is being used for the cultivation of vegetables. Most of the vegetables are grown on the lakeside and retrieved from the lake before being sold in the market. "We mostly sell what we cultivate", said Ghulam Qadir, a vendor while arriving in his boat laden with vegetables.

Pre-dawn vegetable market remains open till morning as dozens of boats come laden with fresh vegetables from the vegetable gardens of Dal-lake and sell it to the wholesale markets and also exchange commodities using the barter system. Many merchants come with other forms of eatables like potatoes, onions, dry ration and instead of money take fresh vegetables in return from the floating market.

The market opens before the first light. Merchants from the city make their way into the lake via interiors of the old city through Rainawari, keeping the supply chain of vegetables open. All of them try to come as early as possible as police and paramilitary forces allow people to fetch milk, bread and vegetables only for few hours in the morning.

Due to restrictions imposed by authorities in the city, ensuring continuous supply of fresh vegetables is one of the means of survival for the people as the city faces an acute shortage of essential items. "This market never shuts because of any lockdown. Vegetable traders from across the Srinagar come here and buy vegetables and then sell it in other parts of the city" said Abdul Majid, a local Vendor.

MAMNETH:  
Of tranquility And Serenity

Musaib Ismail

Kashmir is known for its natural beauty. Apart from the usual tourist places that are abuzz with people, there are certain offbeat places that provide a respite to tourists as well as locals during the summer heat. One such place in Srinagar is Mamneth.

It is a pastoral land having gentle slope, located in the north west of Dara, in the Zabarwan Mountains. Located at an altitude of 8850 feet, the trail to Mamneth is craggy and congested and takes round about two hours of trekking from Gandtal. The Mamneth top presents a panoramic view of the Srinagar city. The sun downs particularly are a treat to watch.

“This is small time trekking spot for city people. It is a beautiful pasture with an aesthetic trail. We love to go these spots often to freshen our minds and relax”, said Fayaz Ahmad, a resident of Dara.

“This is a trekking route for the famous Tarsar-Marsar lakes. The Aru valley in Pahalgam can also be approached from here. Government should promote it as a tourist destination”, said another local, Farooq Ahmad.

Notably, the highest peak in Srinagar, Mount Mahadev which is situated at the altitude of almost 4000 m is also approached through this route. However, if people intend to stay overnight, permission from the army is required.

This place is also the temporary summer settlement for Gujjar community, providing their cattle enough land for grazing. The government has constructed a pond which also adds to the beauty of Mamneth. The trail is dotted with countless log houses locally known as ‘Kothas’.



Pic: Asif Amin

Sandoz:  
A Hidden Paradise

Asif Amin

South Kashmir’s Anantnag district is a goldmine for tourism. Kashmir’s finest tourist places Pahalgam, Kokernag, Verinag, Achabal, Daksum fall in this district. However, there are several other unexplored places that have a huge tourism potential but have been less considered.

Sandoz, an uphill drive of approximately two kilometres from the town of Seer Hamdan is one such place. Dotted by lush green forests, a small meadow, Sandoz is an epitome of scenic beauty and serene atmosphere. It also houses a State Forest Research Insititute, in addition to the famous stream popularly called as ‘Shah Kol’ after the famous Kashmiri King, ‘Budshah’.

This makes the spot best suited for swimming and boating. “I, along with my family last year went to Sandoz for picnic and had a great time there”, said Adil Ahmad, a tourist. “The fresh air and the silence there is soothing”, he added. So far only locals have been visiting this place but its popularity seems to be growing. The reason behind it is that this spot is less explored and yet to be brought on the tourist map.

The advantage with Sandoz is that places like Pahalgam fall enroute that gives the tourists a varied choice of resting and makes travelling more pleasant and less tiresome. Also, the spot itself can be a great resting place for people travelling from Srinagar to Pahalgam and back. “The government has not initiated any developmental programme for Sandoz. Most people don` t know about this place as it is not much explored,” said Javaid Ahmad, a forest guard at Sandoz.



# Kashmir's looming Jobs Crisis Starting To Unravel Amid Lockdown

Pandemic batters K-economy

Murtaza Ali

Dusting the surface of his Honda motorcycle which has been sitting at his home since the pandemic broke out, Muhammad Shafi is hoping to get a new job after the lockdown eases. Shafi, 28 was working in a pharmaceutical company as a manager from past three years. "After finishing college, I took a job as a medical representative in a pharmaceutical company and was promoted as a manager later on", said Shafi.

Shafi has been jobless since April 2020. "After the countrywide lockdown was announced, the company instructed employees to stop working. But when the lockdown was extended, I along with other employees got a termination letter from our company", said a visibly anxious Shafi

"I couldn't arrange my only daughter's school fee during the previous lockdown and school authorities forcefully cancelled her admission" he added. "I was forced to admit

her into a government school", he further said.

According to CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy), over 122 million Indians have lost their jobs due to



pandemic induced lockdown. While the small traders may return to work, those who lost their jobs will find it difficult to get back on track.

J&K has been among the worst hit regions

in the country as it has virtually been under a lockdown since August 2019, with tourism and transport sector among the worst hit.

"Industry was expected to do good business this summer", said Altaf Ahmad, a cab driver associated with tourism sector. "After incurring huge losses last year, many people have defaulted on their bank loans", he said. "If conditions remain the same, I would be forced to sell my cab to pay my bills and expenses", he further added.

"Our businesses have been suffering from the last ten months. We have apprised the Home Minister, Finance Minister and MoS in the PMO, who heard us patiently in March, but nothing has moved ahead since then as COVID-19 changed priorities of the government," president KCCI, Sheikh Aashiq told Economic Times.

The business community claimed that lockdown since August 5, 2019 has crippled the economy in the valley and forced many businesses to shut down.

# Confused by empty roads, stray dogs dominate the streets

Syed Junaid

The increasing number COVID-19 cases that has claimed over 200 lives, with over 6000 cases isn't the only threat that Kashmiris have to contend with. The stray dogs have been a menacing presence in the valley, more so in the capital city, Srinagar. The canines have been storming the streets during this lockdown, chasing vehicles, pedestrians and even attacking some. In some cases, even policemen patrolling the streets have become their target.

Citizens are using social media platforms to raise this issue. Prominent RJ of the valley, Nasir Ali Khan while taking a subtle jibe at the SMC tweeted, "Dear SMC, I would like to bring it to your kind notice that my area Parraypora/ Majeed Bagh has been taken over by stray dogs and come night they sing all sorts of songs which are difficult to understand. Hope you will do something about it." People in response

to that tweet complained of the same in their respective areas. Senior broadcast journalist, Zaffar Iqbal replied "And they rule the streets during the nights chasing away people who venture out."

While taking cognizance of the matter, Joint Commissioner and Official Spokesperson of SMC

tweeted, "SMC is working on multiple strategies with encouraging results, minimizing the availability of garbage and non-veg waste (sic) by closing down open garbage sheds. Door to door collection of waste and Animal Birth Control Programme (ABC-AR programme), are focus of attention. The work on the project is under process and will be shortly commissioned."

Dog menace is a serious issue and due to mismanagement of garbage and solid waste materials, dogs are taking over the dumping sites. According to health authorities 53,925 people, mostly children have been bitten by stray dogs in the valley in past four years.

"One can see dogs in hundreds roaming the streets. They are a threat to everyone in the area" said Basharat Zargar, a resident of Chadoora area of Central Kashmir's Budgam district. Records at

Srinagar's Anti-Rabies Clinic revealed twelve dog bite-related deaths in last three years in valley. Even erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission had described dog attacks as "violation of Human Rights".

Residents in most of the areas said that they are unable to move freely on the roads especially in morning and late hours due to presence of dogs everywhere. In 2012, Mudasir Ahmad Wangnoo, a 12-year-old boy from Downtown Srinagar was critically injured due to a dog attack. Doctors at SKIMS counted 125 bite marks on his body. Since then, there have been reports of thousands of dog attacks in the valley. As per official data, there are about 48,000 dogs in the Srinagar city, but the number is estimated to be around 1 lakh.