

ECONOMIC IMPACT AND ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN STREET VENDORS –POST COVID-19-WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COIMBATORE DISTRICT

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Abstract

India - one of the countries worst-hit by the corona virus - has eased most lockdown restrictions and sought to reopen its battered economy, but some curbs on street trade remain and many customers are staying away. That is taking a heavy toll on the nation's ubiquitous Women street vendors, who sell everything from snacks and cups of tea to toys and shoes at traffic lights, on pavements or from carts. The pandemic has also pummeled the Indian economy, which shrank by nearly a quarter between April and June, when a strict lockdown brought businesses to a halt and left millions jobless. This study is an attempt to understand the present state of a self-employed section of the urban informal sector workers of Coimbatore, namely, the Women street vendors. The present study surveys 100 individual sample respondents using random sampling method. This study is exploratory in nature and focuses broadly on the present income and working conditions after covid-19, The number of Women street vendors is growing significantly owing to the fact that the trade requires a relatively low base of financial capital and offers easy entry-exit conditions. The major findings of the study converge in the last part of the article. It is found that COVID-19 pandemic has resulted to deteriorated working environment and acute deprivation of the Women street vendors. Thus, Women street vendors need to be supported in various aspects.

Keywords: Economic impact , Women Street Vendors, Post Covid-19, Sustainability.

Introduction

Street vendors constitute an integral and legitimate part of the urban retail trade and distribution system for daily necessities of the general public. They represent 4% of the urban workforce across India and play a variety of roles in city life. The street vending economy approximately has a parallel turnover of Rs 80 crore a day and every street entrepreneur or trader supports an average of three others as employees or partners or workers on commission. Street vending which is otherwise known as flea market, is an inseparable constituent of the urban informal economy. When it comes to street vending, the amount of investment and skills required is low, which makes it a relatively accessible opportunity for everyone to earn their livelihood. Due to the national lockdown enforced by the government because of COVID-19, the street vending sector has been severely impacted and the Women street vendors bore the brunt of it. There are approximately 4 Crore street hawkers in India – of which 1/3rd consists of women, who support their families to provide an extra cushion of income. About 82 per cent of the workforce of India is working in the unorganized sector according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). Coronavirus crisis had exposed a widespread lack of awareness about the importance of street vendors to the nation's overall economy. In India, the informal sector contributes to 7% of the country's GDP. According to the International Labor Organization, COVID-19's impact on the informal sector is equivalent to 195 million jobs lost, Women street vendors are not an exception.

Women in Urban Informal Labour Market

In the present scenario when the whole world has to stay at home, these vendors on road are among the groups that are worst affected, without the luxury of work-from-home, the livelihood of the majority is critically hit, a handful of these Women street vendors are still playing their part as the

last link in the supply chain, making sure essentials like vegetables and fruits are still accessible, albeit this also entails being at frontline of the risk. The government's financing programme has had some positive outcomes, allowing Women street vendors to attain a vending certificate and access bank credit, which could help reduce their heavy reliance on loan sharks.

Women street vendors say they often have to pay bribes to police and flee eviction drives ordered by officials who see them as a blemish on the city's image or an obstacle to progress. On the streets, however, many women vendors are losing hope. Some of them could be no longer afford to buy raw materials, pay his children's monthly school tuition fees , their long time savings including their basic small jewellerys got exhausted with in short time since they had no business during lockdown, they had to borrow money from lender in order to meet all their regular affairs.

Review of Literature

Women constitute nearly half of the population of the country and the development will not be inclusive if trickle down effects do not operate for women at large. The gender theorists of urban labour market (standing apart from the feminist perspective) stress the fundamental societal and cultural factors that put women in substandard position both at home and labour market. The subordinate position of women in the labour market and their families are interrelated. Gender theorists suggest that women's inferior position in the labour market can be traced to allocation of higher domestic duties (Rustagi, 2009; Neff et.al, 2012)

Kulshreshtha and Singh,(2005). To recognize women as a growth agent in India's political economy across all sectors, the Committee of Feminist Economist (CFE) was constituted by planning commission to review the facts and analysis of the planning through a gender lens. There are only one third of the India's workforce consist of women out of whom 67 percent were engaged in agriculture (Papola & Sahu, 2012). As agriculture becomes an occupation of the marginalized basically performed by the poor, women in such occupation take it as a secondary or tertiary occupation. In small and less developed towns like Haflong, the predominance of self employment at subsistence level is very common. Street vending constitutes a lion's share of urban labour market in many metropolitan cities like Maharashtra and Kolkata while it constitutes roughly 2 percent of the total city population in Indian cities.

Statement of the Problem

Women are mostly seen as a major percentage of the street vendors in urban centres which provide a source of employment for the poor and also seen as a convenient service to the urban consumers. A women vendor on road often is not affected in singularity, the act of vending usually involves multiple members of the family, the items vend such as affordable food and clothing are vital for the survival of marginal sections of society including urban poor. Street vending has also been a cultural insignia of many cities, and to those who can afford greater luxuries also an occasional engagement. Safe to say their presence is vital in keeping a chunk of our economy and its people going. This raises an important question, what happens to Women street vendors during and post lockdown? And how do we get them back on track and make our systems resilient to deal with such crises in future? Hence this study is undertaken to find out the answers of these questions.

Objective of the Study

- To explore the post pandemic socio economic condition of the Women street vendors in the study area.
- To examine the economic impact of covid-19 on Women street vendors.

Scope of the Study

The study is mainly intended to bring to light, the present state of Women street vendors after Covid -19 pandemic who are doing business within the limits of Coimbatore District and their economic hardships and challenges during pandemic period and post covid-19 as well.

Study Area- Profile

Coimbatore popularly is the smart city is the second industrially advanced district in the state of Tamil Nadu. 100 Women street vendors have been selected in this district by using random sampling method for the purpose of study .In Coimbatore , Many of the traders buy stocks worth Rs 2,500 to Rs 20,000 depending on the products they sell and the type of business, Of the total population of Women street vendors , only 30% have got street vendor cards. The Women street vendors included were, the vendors of Cooked Food, Vegetables and flowers Fruits, Household utensils, Garments and small toys in Coimbatore District.

Research Methodology

The primary data has been collected in the study area, i.e. Coimbatore city, from the period June 2021 and July 2021. The study is an exploratory study which includes of both primary data and secondary data. The primary data required for the study have been collected through an interview schedule and secondary data have been collected from various published sources like journals, magazines, dailies and other mass media both print and internet sources. A sample of 100 respondents have been taken from the study area by using convenient sampling method and the data collected were analyzed with the help of the Simple percentage Analysis.

Limitations of the Study

- The present study is limited to different types of Women street vendors only. Women vendors who are working on wage basis have not been included.
- The sample groups have been restricted to Coimbatore district. So the findings of the study may be generalized to Coimbatore district only.

Analysis and Interpretation

Table No.1 Socio-Economic Condition and Sustainability of Sample Women Street Vendors

S.No.	Factors	Classification	Percentage (%)
1.	Marital status	Unmarried	13 (13%)
		Married	38(38%)
		Widowed	49 (49%)
2.	Age distribution	Below 20	08 (8%)
		21-40	29(29%)
		41- 60	46(46%)
		61-80	17(17%)
3.	Educational Qualification	Illiterate	8(8%)
		Can Sign only	41(41%)
		Upto high school	24 (24%)
		Higher secondary	14(14%)
		Graduate	13 (13%)
4.	Range of Present Activities	Cooked Food	34(34%)
		Vegetables and flowers	14 (14%)
		Fruits	10 (10%)
		Electronic items	16 (16%)
		Household utensils	9 (9%)
		Garments	10 (10%)
		Toys	7 (7%)
5.	Year of Business	Less than 5 years	16 (16%)
		5-10 years	29(29%)
		11-20 years	15(15%)

		21 to 25 years	18 (18%)
		More than 25 years	22 (22%)
6.	Daily Sale(in Rs)	Less than 2000	57 (57%)
		2000-4000	28 (28%)
		4000-5000	6 (6%)
		Above 5000	9 (9%)
7.	Whether covid-19 has impacted in daily sales	Yes	100(100%)
		No	0(0%)
8.	To what extent the business income has got affected in post Covid -19	High level	96(96%)
		Medium level	2(2%)
		Low level	1(1%)
		No change	1 (1%)
9.	What kind of change has taken place in post covid -19	Customers do not prefer buying in streets	6 (6%)
		Working hours minimized	14(14%)
		No healthcare safety to vendors	12(12%)
		Maintenance Packing cost is high	11 (11%)
		Decrease in sales or no sales	35(35%)
		Shortage of raw materials	22(22%)

Results

- Majority of the respondents (i.e.)49% are widowed.
- Majority of them (i.e.) 46%belong the age category of 41-60.
- Majority (i.e) 41% of the respondents is able to only sign and they are not educated.
- Majority of the respondents (i.e.) 35% are cooked food vendors.
- 100% of the Women street vendors have agreed that covid-19 impacted on their daily sales.
- 97% of the respondents are strongly agreed they had negative impact of Covid-19 in their business income at high level, even after post lock down period.
- Majority of the respondents (i.e.) 35% experienced the downfall in their daily sales and no sales at times even after post covid-19 outbreak.

Recommendations

- Awareness may be created among the women street vendors for Hygiene and training may be given to cooked food vendors.
- Government relief and support needs to be de-linked from very rigid registration requirements, as very few women vendors have been registered in India.
- Health insurance for women vendors may be provided by the government
- They may be called for the installation of public sinks and bathroom facilities to help improve hygiene and boost consumer confidence during the pandemic.

Conclusion

The street vendors are the first point of contact in the supply chain for consumers, and in a time when public scrutiny for hygiene is bound to be high, it becomes crucial. The present study shows the demographical and socio-economic aspects of women street vendors. The study pointed out that majority of the women street vendors has been earned low amount of income on daily basis during this covid-19 pandemic, they are sustaining their livelihood with so many difficulties during national lock down and every day they struggle there for restoring their better livelihood, where, street vending is problematic for women although, the women accepting the challenging occupation to

improve the life standard of their family. With India opening up after the lockdown, what is needed now is swift action and support for Women street vendors , not only to secure their safety and earnings but also to facilitate the vital work they could be doing to promote food security in a time of humanitarian crisis. The unprecedented COVID situation has paved the way to new approaches and innovations in problem solving. The local government may have to adopt new mechanisms in order to sustain the economy and support women street vendors in order to curb the damage of the pandemic on the informal sector.

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