

The lockdown and its aftermath on street vendors: A Review

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Abstract:

The impact of covid-19 on street vendors in Bangalore started even before the imposition of lockdown because weekly markets closed one week before the lockdown and vendors were not allowed to operate. This exploratory study is based on secondary data review to understand the challenges faced by the street vendors during pandemic. It was found that lockdown restrictions, social distancing, restrictions on selling on streets, harassments from local authorities were the major challenges faced by the street vendors that lead to unemployment and unpaid work circumstances for many.

Keywords: *Street vendors, COVID-19, lockdown, Bangalore.*

Introduction:

10 million street vendors in India (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation | National Portal of India", 2021). Nearly 200,000 women and 21,500 children are engaged in street vending of articles, goods, food items or merchandise of everyday use, or someone who offers services ("National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India", 2021). The street vending economy approximately has a parallel turnover of Rs 80 crore a day (30660 Cr/Yr) and every street entrepreneur or trader supports an average of three others as employees or partners or workers on commission (Wire, 2020).

A street vendor is a person who sells his goods on streets without a permanent setup. They occupy the private/public spaces usually. Some of them even move from place to place on pushcarts, cycles, autos. Both men and women are self-dependent they don't have anybody to help them (A, 2020).

The impact of covid-19 on street vendors in Bangalore started even before the imposition of lockdown because weekly markets closed one week before the lockdown and vendors are not allowed to operate. Women street vendors suffered the most as they lost access to assets and savings. The pandemic was harsh towards the women street vendors because the work requires excessive mobility and continuous dealing with the customers and mobility was restricted during the lockdown. And moreover women street vendors with small children found it difficult to reach their vending places without any transportation and the eviction drives during the lockdown period. Additionally, the street as a work place is insecure for women since there is a constant threat of sexual harassment and inadequate access to water, sanitization and hygiene facilities also pose a workspace challenge for them.

The Survey of the women street vendors conducted in April/May 2020 underlined that majority of the women vendors have completely lost their livelihoods and many of them have taken loans to survive during the lockdown. Moreover they suffered the burden of unpaid work. They were also striving to arrange for their daily needs such as food, water and fuel from various resources. The study indicates that these families faced many problems in availing health centers and medicines. Many of them even complained that their income has reduced and expenses have increased (Chakraborty & Ahuja, 2021).

They are worried about the impact of pandemic on their livelihood, they feel stressed and tired due to the increased burden of domestic work. They are in the fear of getting infected and are in a dilemma whether to stay in order to stop the spreading of infection or go out and earn for their livelihood (Deka, 2020). Many of them agree that covid-19 has increased the mental stress and tension in their family.

In the absence of any work or customers, these small vendors are at home without any monetary support to fend for themselves or their families (Gupta, 2020).

In the aftermath of the Lockdown imposed due to the COVID 19 Pandemic from March 23, 2020, women street vendors and member of the Self Employed

Women's Association (SEWA) in Kohima, Nagaland faced significant challenges in pursuing their livelihood (NorthEastNetwork, 2020).

The lockdown extension due to covid-19 has affected the lives and livelihood of the street vendors. This is the situation because their work requires physical presence at the workplace without which they cannot earn their wages. They don't have the option of working from home or maintain social distance.

Impact on Employment:

The social distancing and stay-at-home conditions not only restricted the job opportunities of street vendors but also increased the cost of doing business significantly. All the wholesale markets and suppliers were shut during the lockdown period and many of the street vendors had to spend more on travel due to travel restrictions imposed on the city. Though the lockdown restrictions have eased down its difficult for the women street vendors to go out and work as usual (Chakraborty, 2020).

Many of the street vendors said that they had to pay bribe the policemen during an eviction drive ordered by the officials (WIEGO 2020). And many of the times officials seized the products and the vendors had to visit the police station frequently and pay fine and get back their products. This keeps repeating and the fine is heavy, the vendors get tired after sometime paying the fine and they start giving up after sometime (Guha, 2020). And the hope of selling to regular customers further toppled due to growing social trust deficit between street vendors and citizens (Majithia, 2020). The impact of covid on employment can be summarized into the following points:

- Increased cost of doing business
- More expenses on travelling due to lockdown restrictions
- Bribing officials during an eviction drive
- Harassment from police and BBMP officials
- Social trust deficit

Effects of Unpaid work:

Women were doing the work without any payment which was very painful for them and to add it the lockdown had increased their burden (WomenCount, 2020). The study indicates that women are so much used to the routine domestic work that they do not feel that it as additional work which has increased during the lockdown period. They were also burdened with the additional work of looking after the elders as they had keep them safe and the children as they were at home as a result of closure of the Anganwadis (Breakthrough, 2020).

According to the Breakthrough report, the women street vendors said that though the medical facilities were available they were afraid to go to the hospitals as they feared that they might get infected visiting the hospitals. Some of them complained that they were unable to get the treatment for other ailments like Diabetes and Thyroid as the doctors were busy in treating the covid patients.

Apart from these problems the street vendors also faced problems in procuring their food needs due the increased prices and the non-availability of the products as the middle and upper class stocked the food products. They even found it difficult to pay the rent as they had no income (Biswas, 2020).

Loss of income and the reduced market demand for the non-essential goods resulted in anxiety and fear among the street vendors (SEWA 2020).

Covid-19 pandemic is no different on men and women street vendors. The impact is same on both the genders but the women workers had more problem of jobs. The women street vendors even complained of lack of capital for investment. Overall if we consider the pandemic is taking a heavy toll on these all street vendors.

Conclusion:

Street vendors are vital part of informal sector contributing significantly to Indian economy. Street vending is the only source of employment and livelihood for lakhs of people who completely depend on hawking on streets. The strategic response of complete lockdown to manage corona outbreak have left them in an alarming situation. Unlike formal retailers, they are stuck in a situation where they have no idea how to make ends meet when the public have a growing trust

deficit regarding hygiene practices to ensure safe purchase from them. They are left at a crossroad where they can neither find an alternative way to earn nor they can afford hygiene products to safeguard them. Considering their significant contribution to the economy and their indispensable service enriching socio-cultural ecosystem, there is a pressing need to bring them into the spotlight and protect them from sweeping into a financial epidemic. Looking ahead the street vendors are the integral part of the urban lifestyle and the selfless service should be resumed with slow normalcy and with utmost dignity (Allison, Ray & Rohel, 2021). Lockdown challenges faced by street vendors need an immediate solution as the effect on their livelihood will have a ripple effect on their family and economy as well.

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