

Challenges and Insecurities of Women Street Vendors in Madurai District, Tamilnadu

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ABSTRACT

Street vending has been an integrated form of many women's livelihood in both urban and rural cultures in India. Women street vendors, for their livelihood, sell their compact commodities without any permanent built-up structure. Their economic vulnerability constraints them to make their transit markets onto streets through cartwheels & other forms to sustain their livelihood. According to WIEGO (Women in Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing) a voluntary organization, rural women migrate to urban areas for daily livelihood through street vending and market trading. These women street vendors face various livelihood challenges in terms of physical, economical, psychological, social, legislative, and family aspects. This descriptive concept paper attempts to address the livelihood challenges and insecurities faced by women as street vendors in the Madurai district, Tamilnadu by conceptualizing their physical & socio-economical obstacles and with respect to their family dimensions. This study also identifies the various impedimental blocks representing the three dimensions to facilitate a better livelihood and to enable & empower them to be self-sustained.

Keywords: *Livelihood, Informal sector, Insecurities, Vulnerability, Sustainability.*

INTRODUCTION

The capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources), and activities needed to maintain a way of life are all included in the definition of livelihood. A livelihood is viable when it can withstand and recuperate from stress and shocks, as well as maintain and enhance its capabilities and assets presently and in the long run, without jeopardizing its reservoir of natural resources (Chambers & Conway, 1991)¹. Street vending has been integrated as a form of livelihood in both urban and rural cultures of India, especially among women. The term "street vendor" can be roughly described as a person who trades the commodities to the general public without an established building set up or infrastructure². It likewise applies to an individual who sells goods and services on the street, whether from a stand, stall, vehicle, or cartwheel in continuous transit. Women

street vendors are those who sell their compact commodities without any permanent built-in structure.

¹Chambers, R., & Conway, G. (1991). Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century. Retrieved February 3, 2010, from <http://www.smallstock.info/reference/IDS/dp296.pdf>

²National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, 2004, Department of Urban Employment & Poverty Alleviation, MUPA, GOI.

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They are the informal sector workers who sell fruits, vegetables, processed foods, handmade products, and so on for their livelihood. They do not have a shop-like structure nor a permanent place for vending. They are in a continuous transit migration to sell their products. They move from the outskirts into the city on a daily basis for street vending and also, they sell their products on move. They sell products and goods such as fruits, vegetables, spinach, processed foods, pickles, dried fish, broomsticks, handmade candles, incense sticks, artifacts, etc. Their economic vulnerability constraints them to make their transit markets onto streets and with cartwheels. According to WIEGO (Women in Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing) a voluntary organization, rural women migrate to urban areas for daily livelihood through street vending and market trading. These women street vendors undergo tremendous livelihood challenges through physical, economical, psychological, social and familial aspects³. Generally, in India, women street vendors are struggling with poor occupational and seasonal conditions alongside a lack of societal and institutional safeguards, subjecting them to a variety of safety and health risks. They are often forced to live in uncertainty of employment conditions along with poor circumstances like climate and seasonal changes with little access to infrastructure and safety. They encounter problems like frequent evacuation, bribe settlement, difficulty in accessing multiple public amenities such as transport facilities, a lack of utilities such as bathrooms, and lighting, a lack of social security, and other comparable challenges. The challenges faced by street vendors differ from metropolitan, urban, and semi-urban areas. As the population density increases, the scope of street vendors and associated challenges also increase. There is hope that the situation of street vendors will improve with the passage of the groundbreaking Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. The bill advocates for mandatory registration, vendor licensing, the establishment of city vending committees, and, most of all, organized vending zones in urban areas⁴. Still, women street vendors fail to meet their daily needs and face various livelihood challenges. The livelihood challenges and insecurities faced by women street vendors in the Madurai district, Tamilnadu & their obstacles are objectively addressed in this study by identifying their socio-demographic concerns and integrating them into their physical, socio-

economical & familial dimensions, aids and facilitates a better livelihood opportunity, thus enabling & empowering them to be self-sustained, which further will improve the street vending women's informal economy.

SCENARIO

Women street vendors confront numerous challenges given that they belong to a vulnerable population who are not protected by the state, NGOs, trade associations, or any labor law. They deal with issues such as evacuation, bribe settlement, failure to access different governmental services, a shortage of workplace amenities such as bathrooms, and electricity, a lack of social protection, and other comparable obstacles. Because of market price fluctuations, and insecure & irregular employment, they are constantly competing with other street vendors. The profits they make are often inadequate. Online shopping poses a significant threat to the quality and quantity of street vending because it has grown into the norm and emerging method of buying with straightforward access to what one needs at the very doorstep. This negatively impacts women street vendors and poses a great threat to their lives and future. A significant portion of the expanding urban unemployed pool of workers in developing nations like India is taken up by the informal sector, which includes street vending. It opens up an array of employment possibilities and an outlet for generating revenue for disadvantaged populations and the urban poor, particularly individuals who relocate from rural areas. The economic idol of Madurai city has its roots in street vending, times immemorial. Despite its increasing significance in the nation's economy as a whole, the circumstances in which women street vendors operate their businesses are not advantageous to their physical and mental wellness. Furthermore, street vendors confront multiple obstacles while engaging in their selling activities. Because their profession is considered informal, the primary challenges for women street vendors are insecurity and uncertainty. Their physical conditions, family situations, health issues, and societal systems have a major impact on their livelihood statuses. This study delivers a reasonable foundation and assistance to researchers interested in analyzing the challenges faced by street-vending women in their pursuit of earning a stable livelihood. It points out the various stumbling blocks that women street vendors

³Raveendran, G., & Vanek, J. (2020). Informal workers in India: A statistical profile. WIEGO Statistical Brief, 24.

⁴Kumar, S. (2014). Street vendors (protection of livelihood and regulation of street vending) Act 2014: A Right Based approach to livelihood.

cannot identify for themselves, thus enabling and empowering them to lend them their helping hand. It provides a module for the social change agencies and change-makers to improve street vending women's informal economy.

Caballero, Adelaida (2023) in his thesis "Shortchanged: Elderly Women Street Vendors in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea" discovers that elderly women street vendors attempt to demonstrate their inherent dignity and struggle against the routine forms of violence to which they are subjected. Results imply that the self-sustaining personality among old women street vendors is an in-depth denial of oppression as well as "re-traditionalized" national politics, along with assisting them to overcome the challenges of aging in harsh socioeconomic circumstances. Several older women experience desolation and gender-specific exploitative behavior in their families⁵.

Parijat, Chakrabarty & Barsita, Sarkar (2023) in their paper "Involvement Of Women In Street Vending Practices And Procedures In Guwahati City – An Analytical Survey" indicate that a good deal of the female street vendors have dire socioeconomic circumstances. The decision to opt for street vending as a form of their livelihood was made largely out of the need for money. Women vendors encounter numerous barriers when it comes to material procurement, pricing, bargaining preservation of goods, value-chain, interaction, seasonal disparities, gender parity, and workplace wellness and security concerns. Through street vending, they can generate money with relatively little investment and capital. It concentrates on four key facets of the work that women vendors do: their socioeconomic standing; their business operations and management; the challenges that they endure; and their outlook on their line of employment⁶.

Kumar, S & Mariselvam, P (2023) in their paper "Financial Satisfaction Of Women Street Vendors With Special Reference To Coimbatore District" displays how a person's perception of his present economic

circumstances can be used to gauge his degree of financial satisfaction. A person's longing to live a longer and better life might act as motivation for achieving financial fulfillment in the future. Financial satisfaction is the state in which a person is happy with their financial situation. A person is considered financially satisfied if they are happy with their present financial circumstances⁷.

Sheela, A & Gayathri, K (2023) in their paper "A Study On Problem And Prospects Of Women Street Vendors With Special Reference To Salem City" notes that street vendors are just some of the commercial actors in the informal sector who have a direct influence on local government policies. The reason for this is that street vendors undergo regulation since they operate their business by using public spaces like sidewalks and pavements. The study's findings indicated that for members of lower socioeconomic strata, operating as street vendors is their only and most practical means of subsistence. Some street vendors use survival tactics to get by and meet their basic needs⁸.

Indira Priyadarshini, B. (2022) in her paper "Banking Needs Of Women Street Vendors - A Study With Special Reference To Pollachi Taluk" demonstrates that over the years, there have been many significant shifts concerning the social standing of women in India. Poor and illiterate women find themselves compelled to find employment as street vendors as a way to cope with the issue of unpaid labor and joblessness. To make ends meet, they embark on selling things on the street to generate money. The dearth of funding and insufficient confidence to launch fledgling businesses led to a significant percentage of women ending up as street vendors. In addition to giving impoverished women a chance to make ends meet with meager earnings, a large proportion of women rely on street vending as their primary source of income and livelihood. The general population, along with the traditions and customs have led to an unrelentingly high and steady demand for conventional food items, fruits, vegetables, and flowers.

⁵Caballero, A. (2023). *Shortchanged: Elderly Women Street Vendors in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea* (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology)

⁶Chakrabarty, D. P., & Sarkar, B. Involvement of Women in Street Vending Practices and Procedures in Guwahati City—An Analytical Survey

⁷Sambath Kumar, S., & Selvam, P. M. *Financial Satisfaction of Women Street Vendors with Special Reference to Coimbatore District*.

⁸Sheela, A., & Gayathri, K. A Study on Problem and Prospects of Women Street Vendors with Special Reference to Salem City

Women street vendors trade commodities in the vicinity of people by their regular requirements⁹.

Through the analysis of various pieces of literature, the researcher has found that there is a research gap in studies that need to be conducted on the livelihood challenges of women street vendors in the Madurai district. There is a geographical and timely research gap that the researcher fulfills through this study by integrating the appropriate research methods and research designs for this study.

To identify the various challenges and insecurities of women street vendors in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Descriptive Research Design is used for this study to systematically obtain and describe the various livelihood challenges & insecurities faced by the women street vendors in Madurai district, Tamilnadu. This research design was chosen as it enabled the researcher to describe the phenomenology of the prevailing situation of women street vendors. It is also equipped to elaborately find and describe the selected social phenomenon (i.e. challenges and insecurities of women street vendors in Madurai district, Tamilnadu) and the related factors that act upon it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a mixed research methodology that fuses both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The qualitative aspect is suitable to focus on the straightforward descriptions of various livelihood challenges and insecurities that the women street vendors of Madurai face. As the research factor – livelihood challenge is a qualitative factor that needs phenomenological description, the qualitative aspect is more suitable. Thus, describing the research factor phenomenologically enabled the researcher to delve deeper into this selected social phenomenon. Hence the mixed research method was used for this study.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

This study adopted in-depth interviews with unstructured questions as the Method for Data collection

from the women street vendors of Madurai. This method is chosen as the researcher can meet face-to-face and get direct responses from the respondents to evaluate their attributes and body language. It also showcased the respondent's intention to provide valid data as it involved their grief & emotions.

STUDY AREA

The study area for this research is Madurai Corporation. The Madurai corporation has a hundred wards which are divided and classified into 5 different zones such as – the North Zone, the South Zone, the East Zone, the West Zone, and the Central Zone. The researcher conducted the study by collecting samples from all 5 zones of the Madurai corporation.

POPULATION & SAMPLES

The population of this study is the transit women street vendors of Madurai district, with the whole of women street vendors in Madurai corporation as the universe. The population is infinite and there are no available census data. The enumeration process for finding the number of street vendors in the Madurai district is still ongoing and is incomplete. This study used the non-random sampling technique. Since the availability of samples is unpredictable, the researcher adopts this technique for convenience. The researcher chose the samples that were available during the time of field investigation and collected data from those respondents. The sample size of the research is **80 samples**.

Inclusion Criteria: All the transit women street vendors who are married, unmarried, widowed, or separated were included in the sample frame.

Exclusion Criteria: All men street vendors of Madurai and women street vendors who have permanent and stagnant vending places by road pavements in Madurai were excluded in the sample frame.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

All the collected data from the respondents are analyzed and interpreted through thematic analysis- inductive thematic analysis as this enabled the researcher to comprehend the collective data given by the samples. The collected data can be categorized into 3 dimensions of insecurities. or livelihood challenges- physical, social, and financial challenges.

⁹Priyadharshini, B. I. (2022). Banking Needs of Women Street Vendors- A Study with Special Reference to Pollachi Taluk. South India Journal of Social Sciences, 20(1), 54

Table No: 5.1 : Table representing the respondents by their Age category

S. No	Age Category (in Years)	Number of Respondents(n)	Percentage of the respondents (%)
1	30 to 40	13	19.7%
2	40 to 50	15	22.7%
3	50 to 60	22	33.3%
4	Above 60	16	24.2%
TOTAL		66	100%

The above table shows that 33.3% of the respondents belong to the 50- 60 years of age category in which they might undergo the tertiary menopausal stage and feel elderliness through their physical abilities. 24.2% of the respondents belong to the age category of above 60 years of age. Most of them are old age people and suffer from more physical challenges. 22.7% of the respondents belong to the age category of 40 – 50 years of age. They are more likely to go through the earlier stage of menopause and hence have challenges related to hygiene and sanitation. 19.7% of the respondents belong to the age category of 30 – 40 years.

The majority of the respondents (33.3%) belong to the age category of 50 to 60 years of age.

Table No: 5.2 : Table representing the respondents by their educational qualification with respect to their age category

S. No.	Age (in Years)	Educational Qualification of the Respondents			
		Illiterate	Primary	High School	Total
1	30 – 40	1 (1.5%)	4 (6.1%)	8 (12.1%)	13 (19.7%)
2	40 – 50	12 (18.2%)	0 (0%)	3 (4.5%)	15 (22.7%)
3	50 – 60	11 (16.7%)	8 (12.1%)	3 (4.5%)	22 (33.3%)
4	Above 60	16 (24.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	16 (24.2%)
Total		40 (60.6%)	12 (18.2%)	14 (21.2%)	66 (100%)

The above table represents the educational qualifications of the respondents with respect to their age category. A majority of 60.6 % of the total respondents are illiterate. Of which 24.2 % belong to the age category of above 60 years, 18.2% belong to the age group of 40 – 50 years, 16.7% belong to the age group of 50 – 60 years and 1.5% belong to the age group of 30 – 40 years. 21.2% of the total respondents have attended High school level of education. Among them 12.1% of them

are between the age group of 30 – 40 years, 4.5% belong to the age of 40 – 50 years and 4.5 % belong to the age category of 50 – 60 years. A least 18.2 % of the total respondents have been into primary level education. Of which 12.1% are in the age category of 50 – 60 years and 6.1 % belong to 30 – 40 years of age.

The majority of the total respondents (60.6%) are illiterate.

Table No: 5.3 : Table showing the respondents by their working hours per day with respective to their earnings per day

Sr. No.	Wage / Day (in Rs.)	Working hours per day (in hours)				Total
		4-6	6-8	8-10	10-12	
1	Rs. 100 - 200	7 (10.6%)	27 (40.9%)	10 (15.2%)	0 (0%)	44 (19.7%)
2	Rs. 200 - 300	3 (4.5%)	7 (10.6%)	7 (10.6%)	3 (4.5%)	20 (22.7%)
3	Rs. 300 - 400	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (33.3%)
Total		10 (15.2%)	34 (51.5%)	19 (28.8%)	3 (4.5%)	66 (100%)

The above table shows the working hours of the respondents per day with respect to the wage they earn per day. 51.5% of the total respondents work between 6 – 8 hours a day. Of which 40.9% of the respondents earn between Rs. 100 to 200 and 10.6% of them earn between Rs. 200–300 per day. 28.8% of the total respondents work between 8 – 10 hours a day. Among them 15.2% earn between Rs. 100 to 200, 10.6% earn Rs. 200 to 300, and 3% earn up to Rs. 300 to 400 per day. 15.2% of the total respondents work between 4 – 6 hours a day. Of which 10.6% of the respondents earn between Rs. 100 to 200 and 4.5% of them earn between Rs. 200–300 per day. Only 4.5 % of the total respondents work 10 – 12 hours a day to earn Rs. 200 to 300 per day.

Majority of the total respondents (51.5%) work between 6 to 8 hours per day.

OVERALL FINDINGS

A vast majority of the women street vendors belong to the age category of 50 to 60 years of age. Women who

are in their prime youth do not engage in the livelihood of street vending. Women in the senior age group are mostly involved in the livelihood of street vending. A vast category among them belongs to the senior age, where they have to face their old age in isolation without their spouse and are forced to rely on themselves or their children. The respondents were such that, they have lost their husbands over the years (widows) and have been forced into the livelihood of street vending to fill their stomachs and to educate their children. They all lived alone after being widowed and marrying off their children. This makes them feel lonelier and alienated as they are left alone to stand off their feet. Some respondents shared that their children support them to some extent but many grieved that their children nag them for money rather than supporting them. A few respondents said that their children have fought over the pension money or the meager assets that the respondents possess. Most of them are illiterate. They are the victims of school dropouts due to uncertain family income and the patriarchal norms of their contemporary society. Only a handful of women street vendor respondents have been into schooling – that of a primary level education. Hindu women street vendors occupy a great portion. They earn an average wage of below Rs. 200 per day. The respondents from the semi-urban domicile category travel by bus and sell their goods by walking. A few women choose to sell their goods in bi-cycles, tri-cycles and cartwheels. They also buy the goods from rural sources or sell homemade value-added products. Also, they do not have other income sources apart from street vending. Their primary livelihood form is street vending. They rather change the type of good that they sell based on the demand, availability, and market price standards.

The respondents chose street vending to support their family's financial needs. A dense population of the samples chose the livelihood of street vending because of familial needs. They are in a position where they are the sole income earners for themselves or need to substitute their family income to meet their basic living needs. They sell fruits, vegetables, dried fish, pickles, brooms, spinach leaves, small artifacts, wired bags, or small utensils by working between 6 to 8 hours per day. They usually work from morning till evening. They carry their lunch most of the time. They rather eat the leftovers of the previous day than eat freshly cooked food for the day. Some of the total respondents use bi-cycles to sell their commodities. They say that the increased traffic in recent times does not affect their street vending. It

boosts their street vending activity as the slow traffic mobility projects their goods to people. This makes people want to buy their goods. This is evident in the case of women street vendors who sell fresh fruits and vegetables. The street vendors rarely get to use restrooms and bathrooms while street vending. They often lack basic facilities like bathroom facilities, and water for drinking while they are street vending. They use the public toilet units wherever available for the day. This challenges them from going long distances in transit to sell their goods. They find it physically tiresome to carry their heavy loads of goods to distant places. The common physical illnesses that the respondents in the senior age group face are the issues of diabetes, chronic joint pain in knees, and legs, back pain, arthritis, hyper-pressure, etc. The respondents face these physical ailments due to their aging factor. They are also in continuous treatment for such illnesses. A majority of the senior-aged street vending women use slippers as they have diabetes. Not using slippers and having wounds will worsen their diabetic physical condition and impede them from earning their meager income through street vending. Some of the street vending women from rural to urban transitory movement do not use slippers as they are easily worn out due to increased physical mobility.

Some women street vendors have also faced ill treatment from customers while they bargain. The customers do not always treat these women street vendors with self-dignity and worth. But they never quarreled regarding this with the customers. The respondents say that they rather ignore such derogatory words than make a fuss out of it. Half of the women street vendors do not have the necessary provisions or storage facilities to store their goods or excess products. This was a great challenge for the women street vendors who sell perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables as their compact street vending commodity. They do not have enough storage facilities and the perishable food gets spoiled making a loss for the day. They find it very difficult to cope when their profit does not meet their investment capital. This usually happens for a majority of the respondents. They either face a loss of financial capital or they get a very meager profit of rupees 100 to 200 which does not suffice in the recent market price value. Almost half of the respondents are expected to pay bribes to the local police and corporation agents to sell their goods without any impediments. Though the act of bribery is invisible, it acts as a challenge for those street vendors whose daily profit is less than a hundred rupees.

People often show an attitude of indifference in helping them. People rather ignore them even if they need a helping hand to do tough physical work. They rarely rely on family members to do that work. They find that bargaining affects their street vending, it does not directly affect them but rather via competition from other street vendors. Most of the respondents do not sell their goods to customers who bargain for a price that is very low for their capital investment. Hence such customers go for other neighbouring street vendors who sell the same good at a lower price. Hence bargaining and competition from other street vendors pose a great challenge to their street vending. They face the problem of theft and stealing. This happens usually when their goods are not looked after. Some say that animals especially cows eat their fruits and vegetable commodities when left unnoticed. They get debt from others to make their capital source. The street vending women find financial aspects more challenging as they cannot easily afford a capital sum of money. They usually borrow money from usury money lenders or banks or on a mortgage. A majority of the respondents do not take loans from banks as they find it difficult to pay the monthly loans. They instead lend money as debts from their neighbors or closely related people for a very short duration. They also find cooperatives and self-help groups as beneficial sources to get money. The respondents have felt distressed at certain times. They do not share their grief with anybody, but rather they displace such distress with some other household work. The women street vendors are unaware of the governmental schemes related to street vending. A few of the widow street vendors knew about the widow pension scheme that is provided by the national government. They use this amount to pay for the rent and capital investment.

The significant core finding of this study is that these women street vendors take up street vending as their primary livelihood source to escape their poverty and to fulfill their basic needs. But due to several challenges that they face, they are stuck in the cycle of “Urban Poverty”. They transit from rural to urban for street vending, yet their livelihood improvements show a static state. They lack a dynamic state of economic growth or livelihood improvement.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION:

At the moment, both local governing bodies, formal enterprise owners, and the general public have resilient negative measures and attitudes towards women street

vendors. Added to that, women street vendors visage numerous challenges in carrying out their duties. The basic challenges of the women street vendors are listed in the above findings. Their physical conditions, family situations, health issues, and societal systems have a major impact on their livelihood statuses. Hence, the social-change makers should make an initiative to eliminate such factors thus promoting the livelihood statuses of women street vendors. Moreover, there is also a need for creating awareness among women street vendors regarding the various governmental schemes that are available for them such as NULM (National Urban Livelihood Mission), SUSV (Support for Urban Street Vendors), PMMY (Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana), PMSVANidhi (Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor Atmanirbar Nidhi), etc. Further there also other developmental and supportive initiatives like mobile applications, provision of street vending carts, street vendor loans, and subsidies that are available for their livelihood improvement.

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