

A Study on the Street Vendors of Kathmandu Municipality

Neera Shrestha

Faculty of Management / Women Studies, Tribhuvan University, Padma Kanya M. Campus, Bagbazar, Kathmandu, Nepal

ABSTRACT

Street vending is the most visible aspect of the informal sector, where thousands of people earn their living by selling goods on streets, sidewalks and other open public places. The number of street vendors is increasing day by day. Migrants from rural areas who do not possess the skill, knowledge and education to gain a better-paying job in the formal sector were found to settle for street vending. In most of cases, income generation is the secondary role for women whereas earning a living is the primary role for men. So access to income, savings, access and control over resources and freedom to use saved income for women were less significant than for men. The main expenditure of the vendors is on the basic needs of the family. Income earned through street vending has increased the financial independence and decision making power of women within the household. However, the majority of the women engaged in this sector were found to be overburdened with multiple responsibilities.

Nevertheless, this study has shown that traditional attitudes about sex, class and caste based segregation of occupation and work role distribution seem to be changing. This is evident from the fact that the number of Brahmin and Chhetri women and men engaged in street vending is found to be increasing compared to the number of Newar men and women who are engaged in street vending. Traditionally, the main occupation of the Newar is business. The main reasons for the men to be engaged in street vending are to provide for the family and unemployment, whereas the main reason the women are engaged in street vending is that their spouse's income is insufficient to provide for the basic needs of the family. The source of inspiration to pursue business for most of the women and men street vendors is themselves. Street vendors seem to be suffering from different health problems.

Among them the most common are gastritis, headache, backbone pain, cold and fever.

Street vendors also face expulsion from vending locations since there is no proper and systematic vending venue for

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 22 November 2011

Accepted: 16 August 2012

E-mail address:

shrestha_neera@hotmail.com (Neera Shrestha)

their business. Sexual harassment is also a concern for female street vendors in some cases; the Metropolitan City Police are the major threat they face. But one of the key informants from among the customers highlighted that street vendors always caused obstruction for pedestrians and vehicles. It is evident then that street vendors need to be properly managed.

The study showed that 90 per cent of the male street vendors and only 55 per cent of the female street vendors are literate. Thus, there is a great difference in the literacy rate between male and female street vendors. Women street vendors have not yet been able to grasp the opportunity for education due to different social circumstances and lack of awareness.

Both women and men street vendors are not aware of computers and other business and marketing-related technologies. They possess little information about new trends of marketing and selling and also possess little information about the quality or the uses of the goods they sell. They also do not have sufficient time and money to find out about the technology. In this area, women street vendors are far behind the men. As businesses in the informal sector and especially street vending are becoming competitive day by day, there is need for street vendors to be aware of user-friendly technology and product knowledge. Technocrats, especially women technocrats, should be engaged to train women street vendors in terms of product knowledge and technology in order to sharpen the competitive edge of street vendors, especially women street vendors.

Keywords: Street vendors, privatisation, localization, informal sector, migrants, basic needs, lacking resources, leading factors, inspiration

INTRODUCTION

The liberalisation and privatisation policy that Nepal adopted after 1990 has seen more and more people engaged in the informal sectors such as street vending, construction work and domestic work as helpers because the formal sectors like education, health, civil service and social service demand a high level of efficiency, skill and knowledge. Furthermore, the increasing population of Nepal and the shrinking opportunities of employment in the formal sector have also pushed people to gain employment in the informal sectors. Moreover, more and more women are entering paid work, but their entry is mainly in the informal sector and home-based work (UNIFEM, 2005).

In 1972, the ILO and UNDP mission to Kenya introduced the concept of informal sector as follows:

- Ease of entry of new enterprise
- Family ownership
- Small size of operation
- Unregulated and competitive market
- Labor intensive technology
- No state support
- Deplorable working conditions
- Low wages
- (Joshi, 1995)

Street vending has been categorised under the informal sector. It is a global phenomenon where millions of people earn their living wholly or partly by selling a wide range of goods on the streets, sidewalks and other public places. It is conducted in the open air without any fixed framework for street vendors to operate their business.

Street vendors are self-employed individuals. Street vending is a means of survival for individuals who lack sufficient capital, skill and knowledge. People are making their existence by selling clothes, bags, shoes, cereals, fruits, books, technical items, seeds, plants, foods etc. on the road. However, the vendors work to maintain their regular livelihood. Street vending is also a good temporary job while permanent employment is being sought.

The number of street vendors and the nature (types) of goods they sell in New Road, Ratna Park, Old Bus Park, Bhotahity, Sundhara, Bagbazar, Judda Salik and Khichapokhari are as Table 1 below.

Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, provides most facilities needed in

contemporary life and is home to all types of businesses. Thus, there is a tendency for people from all other districts in Nepal to migrate to Kathmandu in search of better-paying jobs. Most men and women migrants from the rural areas are less qualified for formal jobs, and so, are engaged in informal jobs that require low investment and offer low returns. As they do not have alternative employment opportunities, they seek easier sources of income. The cost of living in the city is higher, and these migrants find themselves struggling to make ends meet. In addition, they are often saddled with the responsibility of having to look after parents and children back in their villages. Married couples that arrive together in the city find that both must work in order to earn an income that is sufficient to manage the household.

The Kathmandu Metropolitan City office records of 2007 show that among 56 per cent of the total number of street vendors are males selling different items while 44 per cent are female vendors selling different items. This shows that the percentage of

TABLE 1
No of Street Vendors in New Road, Ratna Park, Old Bus Park, Bhotahity, Sundhara, Bagbazar, Judda Salik and Khichapokhari:

Nature of goods	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Ready-made goods	856	58	630	42	1486	100
Vegetables and others	57	35	106	65	163	100
Push cart and cycle	64	65	34	35	98	100
Tea and lunch	50	61	32	39	82	100
Total	1027	56	802	44	1829	100

Source: The Kathmandu Metropolitan City office (2007)

male and female street vendors is almost equal.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of the study is to provide meaningful information on street vendors in Kathmandu Municipality from the perspective of gender. The specific objectives are as follows:-

- To identify the factors that have led them to street vending
- To examine their income and expenditure
- To examine their health condition

STUDY METHOD

This is a study of the Municipality of Kathmandu District. The study was exploratory and descriptive. It is exploratory in the sense that very few studies on street vendors have been done, and descriptive in the sense that it has provided descriptive information about the socio-economic situation of Kathmandu street vendors.

The Kathmandu Municipality as a study area was selected with a specific purpose in mind. The respondents, the key persons of the NEST (Nepal Street Vendors Union) and personnel of Kathmandu Metropolitan City office were also taken with a specific purpose in mind. This study is based on field observation and collection of data through questionnaire. There were fifteen questions in the schedule including information on demographic background, income, expenditure, educational background, factors leading to engagement in street

vending, source of inspiration and health-related problems. The total sample size was 40, which consisted of 20 men and 20 women street vendors. They were interviewed using the convenience sampling method.

STUDY AREA

Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, is located in the central Development Region of Nepal. It is a development centre of the region and the most populated district in the country. The rapid growth of population in various urban centres like Kathmandu is largely owing to the shift of rural people to metropolitan cities in search of better-paid employment or for study. The area of the study was New Road, Ratna Park, Old Bus Park, Bhotahity, Sundhara, Bagbazar, Judda Sadak and Khichapokhari of the Kathmandu Municipality. These are the busiest markets of the capital and are all situated in the heart of the city where a large number of street vendors sell a variety of goods.

The population of the city is composed of various types of ethnic groups like Brahmin, Chhetri and Newar and the ethnic castes including Magar, Gurung, Rai and others.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents belong to the age group 16-60 years; 100 per cent of the males are from the age group 16-60 while 95 per cent of the females are from the 16-60 years age group and 5 per cent of the females are above 60 years. None of the males and females are from the child

group i.e. from the age group 1-15 years. This shows that most of the street vendors are from the active age groups.

Table 3 shows that 35 per cent of the males are from the Brahmin caste, 40 per cent from the Chhetri, 5 per cent from the Ethnic group and 20 per cent from the Newar. On the other hand, 25 per cent of the females are from the Brahmin caste, 50 per cent from the Chhetri, 15 per cent from the Ethnic group and 10 per cent from the Newar. Most of the street vendors, then, are from the Brahmin and Chhetri castes. The data here shows that more men and women of the so-called upper castes are now engaged in the business of street vending although business has traditionally been the domain of the Newar caste. It would appear that a shift in traditional thinking is taking place.

Table 4 shows that 10 per cent of the males and 45 per cent of the females of the respondents are illiterate while 90 per cent of the males and 55 per cent of the females are literate. This highlights a great difference in the literacy rate between males and females. Males are more literate than female. This is probably due to the fact that women in Nepal are not yet given sufficient opportunity for education because of different social circumstances and lack of awareness.

The table 5 shows that 45 per cent of the female vendors are engaged in street vending due to the fact that their spouse earns insufficient income to fulfil the basic needs of the family. In contrast, 35 per cent of the male vendors are engaged in street vending in order to provide for the family. Therefore the reason for being engaged in

TABLE 2
Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1-15	0	0	0	0
16-60	20	100	19	95
Above 60	0	0	1	5
Total	20	100	20	100

TABLE 3
Caste / Ethnicity of Respondents

Caste/Ethnicity	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Brahmin	7	35	5	25
Chhetri	8	40	10	50
Ethnic	1	5	3	15
Newar	4	20	2	10
Total	20	100	20	100

TABLE 4
Educational Status of Respondents

Educational Status	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	2	10	9	45
Literate	18	90	11	55
Total	20	100	20	100

TABLE 5
Factors Leading to Street Vending

Reasons	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployment	6	30	2	10
No house and land	3	15	1	5
Interest in business	1	5	1	5
Parental business	1	5	-	-
To provide for family	7	35	2	10
Insufficient income earned by spouse	-	-	9	45
Saving	-	-	3	15
Others	2	10	2	10
Total	20	100	20	100

street vending differs for men and women. 'Others' in the table refers to the terror of Maoist insurgents and the neglect of children.

Table 6 shows that 20 per cent of the male street vendors attribute friends as being the source of inspiration for their decision to pursue business while 5 per cent point to relatives, 50 per cent to self and 25 per cent to others. None pointed to their in-laws as the source of inspiration for their decision to pursue business. In case of the female street vendors, 5 per cent pointed to friends as the source of inspiration for their decision to pursue business, 5 per cent pointed to in-laws, 50 per cent to self and 40 per cent to others. None of the female street vendors pointed to their relatives as the source of inspiration for their decision to

pursue business. This suggests that women are not supported in their decision to become street vendors.

Table 7 shows that 50 per cent of the male street vendors earned an income in the range of Rs. 5001-10000, whereas 70 per cent of the female vendors earned an income in the range of Rs. 1000-5000. The reason for the monthly income of the women being lower than that of the men may be the lower investment of time and effort of the individual in the business as many of the women street vendors have multiple tasks: they have to take care of their children, do domestic work and operate their business as well. This triple responsibility is likely the reason that the women street vendors earn less than the men.

TABLE 6
Source of Inspiration for Business

Source of Inspiration	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Friends	4	20	1	5
In – laws	0	0	1	5
Relatives	1	5	0	0
Self	10	50	10	50
Others	5	25	8	40
Total	20	100	20	100

TABLE 7
Monthly Income of the Respondents

Income in Rs.	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1000 – 5000	6	30	14	70
5001 – 10000	10	50	3	15
10001 – 15000	4	20	3	15
Total	20	100	20	100

DECISION ON EXPENDITURE

Only significant figures have been analysed under decision on expenditure. The figures on decision on expenditure show that 65 per cent of the female respondents take the decision about the expenditure for food while among the males, 65 per cent of the respondents said that family members, namely wives and mothers, make the decision on expenditure. But the other figures indicate that both spouses decide jointly on household expenditure. Forty per cent of the female respondents said that both spouses decide on expenditure for medicine and clothes while 48 per cent said that both spouses decided on expenditure for their children's education, 80 per cent said both decided on expenditure for entertainment and 60 per cent said both decided on

expenditure for capital goods. Among the men, 50 per cent of the respondents said that both spouses decided on expenditure for medicine and clothes, 53 per cent said both decided on expenditure for their children's education, 64 per cent said both decided on expenditure for entertainment and 50 per cent said both decided on expenditure for capital goods. Except for expenditure on food, the decisions on all other expenditure are made jointly by both spouses; this suggests equality in the relationship between husband and wife in the household.

Table 8 shows that 12 male street vendors suffered from headache, 5 from gastritis, 1 from backbone pain, 4 from cold and fever, 1 from high blood pressure, chest pain and acidity. Among the female street vendors 9 suffered from headache, 8 from

gastritis, 3 from cold and fever and 1 from backbone pain, high blood pressure, eye inflammation and chest pain respectively. Three of the male street vendors and 4 of the women street vendors did not suffer from any type of pain. Most of the male and female street vendors suffer from headache and gastritis. This may be due to working in the open and not eating at the proper time. More men than women street vendors suffer from headache while more women than men suffer from gastritis.

TABLE 8
Health Problems

Health Problems	Male	Female
	Frequency	Frequency
Headache	12	9
Gastritis	5	8
Backbone pain	1	1
Cold, fever	4	3
High blood pressure	1	1
Chest pain	1	1
Eye inflammation	0	1
Acidity	1	0
Nothing	3	4

* Multiple responses and the figures add up to more than 100

CONCLUSION

Street vending has been the most visible occupation of the informal sector where thousands of people earn a living by selling goods on the streets and sidewalks and in other open public places. The number of street vendors is increasing day by day. Migrants from rural areas arriving in the city in search of gainful employment and

who do not possess the skills, knowledge and education to qualify for a better-paid job in the formal sector were found to settle for street vending. Among women, street vending is the secondary work whereas among the men, it is the primary work. Access to income, savings, access and control over resources, freedom to use saved income were lower for female street vendors than for male street vendors. The main expenditure of the vendors is on fulfilling the basic needs of the family.

Income earned through street vending has increased the financial independence and decision-making power of women within the household. However, most of the women street vendors are overburdened with triple responsibilities. Nevertheless, there is some gender equality between the men and women street vendors.

This study shows that the traditional attitude of the people is beginning to change. This is also evidenced by the fact that the number of Brahmin and Chhetri involved in business is increasing to overtake the number of Newar in business. The Newar have traditionally been involved in business.

The main reasons for street vending among the men are to provide for the family and unemployment whereas for the women, it is because the income earned by the spouse is insufficient. For both genders, however, the source of inspiration for pursuing business is self.

Street vendors seem to suffer from different health problems. Among the most common are gastritis, headache, backbone pain and cold and fever.

Street vendors also face expulsion from vending places as there is no proper and organised vending place for street vendors. Sexual harassment is a problem for female street vendors in some cases and the Metropolitan City Police are the major threat to them. However, street vendors do cause some traffic problems such as obstructing roads meant for pedestrians and vehicles. This suggests that a proper management system of street vendors needs to be put into place.

Both women and men street vendors are not computer-savvy nor are they aware of business and marketing-related technologies. They possess little information about new trends of marketing and selling and also possess little information about the quality of the goods they sell. They do not have the time and money to find out about and learn new technology. They also do not know the uses of the items they sell. In this area, women street vendors are far behind the men. Since the informal sector businesses and especially street vending are becoming competitive day by day, there is a need for vendors to learn about technology as well as how to use it. Specific technocrats, especially women technocrats, could be got to train women street vendors accordingly and to impart knowledge and disseminate information to them from time to time so that the competitive edge of women and men street vendors can be increased.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY

The informal sector businesses including street vending is becoming competitive day by day. It is a large source of employment especially for women as compared to men. But it was found that street vendors face various problems from customers and the metropolitan police. There is a need for the government to provide proper management of street vendors, and this includes providing a safe and suitable location away from busy roads for them to operate their business. This will also ensure that the city is neat, clean and attractive.

In order to ensure that the human rights of street vendors are not violated, street vending should be legalized. Proper laws and regulations should be formulated to this end.

There is no actual gender disaggregated data in the NEST (Nepal Street Vendors Association). The association should, therefore, look into this and provide for the collection and archiving of data related to street vendors by gender as well as by overall immersion in the business. This will make it easier for the drafting of gender-friendly policies.

Both men and women street vendors are not aware of business- and marketing-related information technology. Even if most of the street vendors have no higher education, they need to learn information technology as they live and work in this age of information technology. The association should, therefore, provide the relevant training to street vendors in order that their knowledge and capacity might be increased.

REFERENCE

- Bhowmik, S. K. (2005). *Street vendors in Asia: a review*. Retrieved from http://www.wiego.org/papers/2005/unifem/4_Bhowmik_Asian_Hawkers_EPW.pdf.
- Chakravarti, U. (1993). Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in-Early India-Gender, Caste, Class and State. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol - XXVIII No. 14, April 03, 1993.
- Dahal, J. (1998). *Small entrepreneur in the cities, a social study of street vendors in Lalitpur sub metropolis* (Unpublished Thesis). Central Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
- Ghimire-Niraula, P. (2003). *Globalization and its impact on women's work and employment*. Hamro Sansar: A world of our own, Issue 2, Central Department of Home Science, Padmakanya Campus, Bagbazar, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- Jhabvala, R. (1992). In Sujata G. (Ed.), *Women's Struggles in the informal sector: Two case studies from SEWA. Struggles of women at work*. Vikas Publishing House LTD, New Delhi.
- Joshi, S. J. (1995). *Women workers at the grass root level: A Sociological Study*. Aashish Publishing House, New Delhi.
- Shrestha, N. (2008). *A study on street vendors of Kathmandu District from gender perspectives*. unpublished A mini research submitted to University Grants Commission, Sano Thimi, Bhaktapur, Nepal.
- The Kathmandu Metropolitan Office. (2007). *Kathmandu Upatyakako Phootpat Byapar Ma Dekhiyeko Samsya Samadhan Gari Phootpath Byapar Lai Byabassthit garna Ka Lagi Tatkalin Ra dirghakalin Upayaharu Pahichan Gari Pratibedan Pesh Garna Gathit Adhyayan Toli Ko Pratibedan* (In Nepali).
- UNFPA (2007). *Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Nepal*.
- UNIFEM (2005). *Accountability to the world's women: progress of South Asian women*. A series for the fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference celebrating Beijing plus ten