

IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON STREET VENDORS

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INTRODUCTION:

Street vendors are those who sell goods with no built structure. They sell all kinds of goods and services to the public. They don't have permanent structure to work. Instead, they have a temporary and static structures, mobile stalls etc., They form an integral part of the informal sector of an economy. The Indian government announced lockdown in March 2020 due to rise in COVID-19 cases. It is indeed one of the serious and strictest lockdowns in the whole world. It costed the livelihood of street vendors, construction and daily wage labourers, domestic workers, home based workers, garment workers etc., who come under the informal sector of an economy. This study focuses much on the impact of pandemic on street vendors. In fact, COVID-19 crisis has led to loss of job of many people and those employees of formal sector choose street vending for their livelihood with no choice.

The topic of this study is very much relevant during the current pandemic. Street vendors are at greater risk for coronavirus infection. It can also be considered as a main source of virus transmission due to their mobility and exposure. Knowledge of street vendors and

their families' hardships can help us understand their attitudes and needs during the pandemic. There was a massive fall in employment opportunities in almost all the sectors during the pandemic while, vulnerable groups like street vendors suffered a lot financially and economically. The "stay home, stay safe" campaigns in media are not useful for this group of people who do not receive a fixed salary or do not have stable income. This study helps us in understanding the struggles of street vendors that they have undergone till now, still undergoing and the measures that could be taken to solve their problems. It also focusses on the negative impacts on their personal life too during pandemic and post-pandemic.

The study helps us to understand how street vendors have dealt with pandemic to resume their livelihoods during lockdown and post lockdown. From the secondary sources of the study, it is found that there is no equivalent to COVID-19 crisis with more than 4.3 million positive confirmed cases and over two lakh ninety thousand deaths globally. It has affected human health, jobs and the global economy. And therefore, street vending has expanded tremendously of all sizes in public places of cities.

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Street vending also represents an essential source of income for marginalized people, mainly rural migrants. Public policy implementation on street vending, based on less knowledge of the same would be problematic. Because there are no defined street vendors as their needs and attitudes are certainly unknown. Their family net income has been decreased which in turn has led to decrease in purchasing power of necessities such as food and shelter. The study also helps us in comparing the behavior of street vendors with that of employees working in the formal sector.

As the street vendors keep moving from place to place and have more contact with people, there are high chances of spreading virus or disease. They put their life to risk for their family survival as they don't get paid without work. They can't stop working even when there is complete lockdown. Most of the street vendors were insulted and beaten-up during lockdown by the police. The government doesn't seem to completely understand the practical problems of street vendors and so it implemented a policy which had adverse effect on their lives. Besides, government should implement science-based economic, healthcare policies. It should make sensible decisions to protect them and prevent them from becoming a source of virus spreads. Even after introducing vaccination for COVID-19, the availability of dosages for the people working under informal sector was difficult.

For people working under formal sectors, the employers would organize vaccination drives in their premises and make sure that all the employees get vaccinated. This was lacking for the street vendors and others coming under informal sectors. They had to struggle to get their vaccination too, Medical Science says that

nutrition is important to boost immunity power to fight against the disease, which is not easy for street vendors to get unless they strive hard and earn for it.

Although government has introduced a relief package for them according to STREET VENDORS ACT of 2014, it failed to consider that majority of vendors do not have proper identification cards because of lack of awareness, education and active bank accounts. The act was introduced with a view to provide positive environment and regulatory framework to support the community of street vendors.

The online payment preferences by the customers have also affected the business of street vendors due to their inactive bank accounts and discomfort in UPI payments. Most of the street vendors are not educated and they do not believe in transfer of money to their bank accounts. They want cash to lead their day-to-day life. But exchange of cash was also another problem during the pandemic as it can be a source of spread of virus. The customers would move to the vendor who has UPI payment facility, which in turn affected the income of person with no such facility.

Problems faced by street vendors

The life of street vendors is definitely not a cake walk they struggle day and night to earn the livelihood. Below are the problems faced by the street vendors during pandemic

- ♦ The working hours and also mode of travel, hardly provides rest for them which in turn have an adverse effect on their health.
- ♦ They are not getting financial assistance from the bank to establish their business in a better way.

- During lockdown they had a problem to sell their products,
- Many of the street vendors were not aware of online payments, by which they had to lose the customers

Findings

- Our study showed that street vendors significantly reduced their earnings during the pandemic
- Even though different sectors of the population were hit badly by the pandemic, the most exposed sector was the street vendors.
- Drop in their earnings made the street vendors much difficult for providing food and shelter to their families.
- The drawback of not getting a fixed salary made the street vendors to work during the pandemic risky their life.
- Street vendors also suffered to get vaccinated
- Highest number of street vendors were affected during the pandemic and also lost their lives.
- Relief packages provided by the government was not helpful to them

Suggestions

Though the pandemic has not ended in the country, people are slowly getting back to the normal life by getting vaccinated, here are the few suggestions for the betterment of street vendors

- Packed foods should be provided for all the street vendors

- Vaccination must be provided to all the street vendors without much delay
- They must be trained to use online payment apps like (phonepe or g-pay)
- Government can take up the initiative to allot some places for the street vendors to run the business.
- Street vendors must be educated regarding the effects of covid -19 and also the importance of wearing mask

Conclusion

Street vendors are an important part of the informal sector, not because of their numbers but the role they play in preserving their sector. Significant amount of goods produced by the small industries in the informal sector are sold by the street vendors. The contribution of street vendors is unfortunately not recognized by the government. However, the impact of covid-19 on street vendors was much higher compared to another sector. This study has made an attempt to understand the problems faced by the street vendors during the pandemic. And also some measures are being suggested. To conclude covid-19 had a very bad impact on the street vendors and many have lost lives battling with this pandemic. People are now aware of covid-19 and are taking measures to prevent it.

