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Urban Unorganised Workers- The Impact of Covid Pandemic on Street Vendors. A Study On Visakhapatnam Urban Area

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ABSTRACT: Street vendors are basically the people who sell their goods on the streets, pavements or on the footpaths. They do not have permanent shops and face uncertainties. Unorganised sector plays a pivotal role in income generation and reducing unemployment in India. Street vendors are one such category which comes under unorganised sector of the Indian Economy. These street vendors not only contribute to the GDP of the country but also help in providing employment to a large number of unemployed with less investment. With the declaration of Covid 19 as Pandemic by WHO on 11th March 2020 (WHO, March 11 2020) most of the countries went for lockdown and India declared its first lockdown on 24th March 2020 (NistulaHebbbar, 2020) and again with the surge in cases Andhra Pradesh State government had declared a curfew in the month of May 2021 (India.com, 2021). These situations had caused an adverse effect on the street vendors as their activities were halted and most of them lost their bread and butter. They get limited support from the government and NGO's though they have a significance contribution to the economy. This research aims to explore the impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on the street vendors in Visakhapatnam Urban area. 100 respondents have been studied from Gajuwaka zone of Visakhapatnam Urban area through random and convenient sampling techniques.



KEYWORDS: Street vendors, unorganised sector, Covid 19 Pandemic, Lockdown.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to NASVI, a street vendor is a person who offers goods or services for sale to the public without having a permanently built structure but with a temporary static structure or mobile stall. (NASVI) Street vendors are one of the vital components of the Indian urban informal sector. Street vending contributes for around 14% of the urban informal employment of India. (DivyaA, 2020) They help in creating the employment opportunities and generate income to the country. They make the areas lively. Though street vending is recognised as a profession under Street Vendors Act 2014, it is pathetic to say that its implementation is still at ground level and very little support is extended to them.

The objective of National policy on Urban street vendors 2004 is to promote and provide a compassionate environment to the street vendors and to ensure that they can carry on their activities in congestion free areas and provide proper facilities and maintain hygiene in the streets and public places (National Policy For Urban Street Vendors, 2004). Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 is an Act to provide for the social security and welfare of unorganised workers and for other matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. (ACT NO. 33 OF 2008, 2008). Street Vendors Act, 2014 aims to protect the rights of urban street vendors and regulate street vending activities. It has also prescribed the rights and obligations of street vendors as well as the procedural protection for them at the time of the relocation or eviction. (Urban Lex, 2014)

Irrespective of the central -PM SVANidhi and AP State government - Jagananna Thodu schemes provided to the street vendors their conditions still remained unchanged over and above the pandemic added fuel to their misery.



(PrasannaKarthik, 2021) (PrasadNichenametla, 2020). Unorganised sector in India contributes 90% to the workforce and 50% the National product. According to the statistics of Government of India the unorganised sector contributes nearly 50% of the GDP. (AshokeKMaitra, 2020). Currently Covid 19 pandemic is the most challenging situation globally and it has engulfed many sectors of Indian Economy. During lockdowns, businesses were closed, but not the houses. Incomes were locked but expenditure was wide open and was never ending. Though we have achieved the highest levels of development in science and technology to lead our life in a luxurious manner, there are people in unorganised sector who are struggling to earn their daily bread.

This research emphasises basically on the livelihood of street vendors during the lockdown and pandemic time who gave their significant contribution to the economy. The street vendors provided with all the required things at affordable prices to every section of the society. They always had a continuous income. The outbreak of the pandemic has changed the things upside down and created havoc in the lives of street vendors. The streets which looked lively with these vendors turned dull and made the lives of these people highly difficult. So these street vendors are now looking for an opportunity to get back to their previous living conditions.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

- 1) To study the impact of Covid 19 pandemic on the street vendors in Gajuwaka Zone of Visakhapatnam.
- 2) To study how they planned to cope up post lockdown period.
- 3) To study if the street vendors are aware of Unorganised Labour Act 2008 and Street vendors Act 2014

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As per Government of India urban vendor includes both service providers and traders both stationary as well as mobile. It includes terms like pheriwala, hawker, footpath dukandars, side walk traders etc. (NASVI)

As per the article published in the Indian express on 6th November 2020, there are around 50-60 lakh street vendors in India. The local bodies often conduct eviction drives in order to clear the payments and seize their goods and in turn the vendors have to pay heavy fines to recover them. (DivyaA, 2020)

The statistics of the recent decades bring onto limelight that there are 2 billion workers worldwide in the informal economy and make significant contributions to the global economy. This sector is changing in many ways with respect to place, appearance, products. If given a proper support this helps to reduce the poverty and inequality. (WIEGO)

The lockdown which is continuing to stop the spread of Covid 19 has deteriorated the living quality of more than 90% of people engaged in the unorganised sector. (A.S.Jayanth, 2020)

The informal sector played a vital role in rural urban migration, apart from absorbing the labour it was dynamic and productive and gave scope for labour to sustain. (PrabirBhattacharya, 1998)

The factories in the formal sector are moving from urban to rural locations where as on the other hand the informal sector is moving from rural to urban. (Ghani et al 2012)

In a study conducted by Sharit K. Bhowmik in the year 1998 in association with NASVI had shown that most of the poor in urban areas purchase from the street vendors as they offer the goods at affordable prices. (SharitKBhowmik)

Dr. V. Jaishankar, Mrs. L.Sujatha during their research about the Study on Problems Faced by the Street Vendors in Tiruchirappalli City found that most of the street vendors are facing problem with capital, social security, bribing authorities and price fluctuations. (DrVJaishankar&Mrs.LSujatha, 2016)

Polamarasetty Kiran and Phani Babu in their research laid an emphasis on the problems faced by the street vendors and suggested the requisites to provide the rights of these people. (PolamarasettyKiran&PhaniBabu, 2019)

Debdulal Saha in his study laid an emphasis on the decent working conditions for the street vendors and had also suggested policies to improve the living conditions of the street vendors. (DebdulalSaha, 2009)

Mini Bhattacharyya in her research on Street Food Vending in Guwahati: A Survival Strategy revealed that the urban poor sustain through vending business and generates revenue to the municipalities. They also provide their services which break the barriers in the society. (MiniBhattacharyya, 2001)

Prasenjit Bujar Baruah and M. P. Bezbaruah in their study observed that the financial access does not have a significant association with the financial performance, but the growth of urban organized sector critically depends on the financial access. (PrasenjitBujarBaruah&M.P.Bezbaruah, 2020)

The National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) has shown stern disappointment and discontent, over the new Model scheme formulated by the Government of Delhi on 1st May 2014, relating to the regulations and protection of the street vendors all over the city. NASVI hopes the government to set the things at the earliest. (NASVI)

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is Explorative and Descriptive in nature. The data is collected from the street vendors in Gajuwaka Zone of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The data collected is a primary in nature and the population is the street vendors in the Gajuwaka Zone. The street vendors are wide spread around the city doing diverse business through vending. They come under the purview of GVMC.

The data is collected through random sampling and convenient sampling. 4 areas that come under Gajuwaka zone are randomly selected. Convenient sampling was used as the size of the population is undefined. The required information was collected from 100 respondents from 4 different areas of the Gajuwaka zone. The data was collected through direct oral interview. The questionnaire was prepared in English and translated to local language Telugu, while collecting the information.

Areas Surveyed	
Name of the area	Number of vendors
Sheelanagar	15
Nattayyapalem	20
Chettivanipalem	15
Old Gajuwaka	50
Total	100

V. LIMITATIONS

- 1) Gajuwaka zone being a vast area only 4 areas were covered
- 2) The study ignored the people who have already left the street vending and joined other professions.
- 3) Similarly the people who became unemployed due to pandemic or other reasons and taken up street vending are not considered during this study.
- 4) The exact loss in terms of monetary figures is not stated during this study.
- 5) Only the vendors who sell specific type of goods are taken for study as it is based on convenient sampling method.

VI. SCOPE OF STUDY

- 1) Can be extended to the other street vendors selling different products
- 2) Only one main area of the city is focused on so it can be further extended to other parts of the city too.

VII. INTERPRETATION OF DATA

a) Demographic Information

Table 1 Gender	Number	Percent %
Male	68	68
Female	32	32

Street vendors come across lots of difficulties everyday especially like sales, handling customers, weather, adhering to the rules and regulations, quality etc. The job of street vendors is very difficult as most of them have to stand for hours together irrespective of weather conditions. Further in case of any road extensions or repair works they have to search for a new place for business.

Irrespective of all these hardships faced, along with male vendors, female vendors are also actively doing this vending business. According to the survey of the total respondents 68% are Males and 32% are Females.

Table 2 Marital status	Number	Percent %
Unmarried	23	23
Married	72	72
Widow	5	5

A large percent 72% of the married people are engaged in this street vending, 23% are unmarried and 5% are widows.

Table 3 Tenure in street vending	Number	Percent %
<5Years	6	6
5 to 10 years	13	13
>10 Years	81	81

A Maximum of 81% are doing this street vending business for more than 10 years. 13% are into this business from 5 to 10 years and 6% are doing this for less than 5 years.

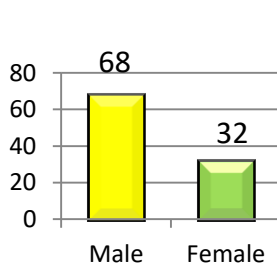


Chart 1 Gender

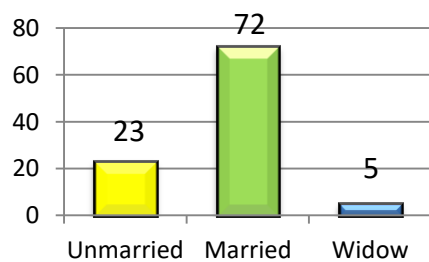


Chart 2 Marital Status

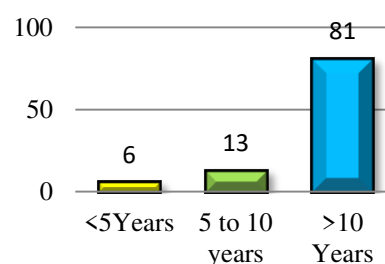


Chart 3 Tenure in Street Vending

b) Socio information

Table 4 Family size	Number	Percent %
< 4	37	37
4 to 6	49	49
>6	14	14

Of the 100 people surveyed, 37 respondents said that their family size is less than 4, 49 respondents said that they have 4 to 6 members in their family and only 14 respondents have a higher family size of more than 6.

Table 5 Earning members	Number	Percent %
1	62	62
2 to 4	31	31
> 4	7	7

62% of the respondents are the only earning members in the family, 31% of the respondents have 2 to 4 earning members and 7% of the respondents have more than 4 earning members in the family.

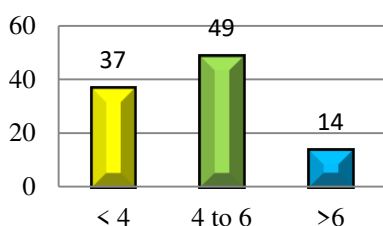


Chart 4 Family size

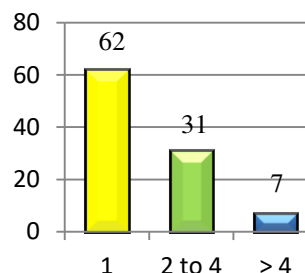


Chart 5 Earning members

c) **Economic information**

Table 6 Business Hours	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %
<6hrs	10	10	68	68
6 to 8hrs	42	42	21	21
>8hrs	48	48	11	11

The economic status of the street vendors is badly affected due to the pandemic as there were reduced business hours after easing the Covid 19 restrictions.

Based on the survey, 10% of the vendors worked for less than 6 hours per day before pandemic, but during pandemic it increased to 68%. 42% of the vendors worked for 6 to 8 hours per day before pandemic whereas 21% of the vendors worked for 6 to 8 hours per day after pandemic. Vendors who worked for more than 8 hours per day before pandemic were 48% and during pandemic it is only 11% of the respondents.

Table 7 Income per day	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %
300-500 Rupees	15	15	68	68
600- 1000 Rupees	56	56	18	18
>1000 Rupees	29	29	14	14

The earnings of the street vendors drastically reduced during this phase. 15% of the respondents earned 300 to 500 rupees per day before pandemic and it is 68% during pandemic. 56% of the respondents earned 600 to 1000 rupees per day before pandemic and it is 18% during pandemic. 29% of the respondents earned more than 1000 rupees per day before pandemic and it is only 14% during pandemic.

It can be analysed that the fall in income during the pandemic period might be due to reduced working hours.

Table 8 Monthly expenditure	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %
Rupees 3k to 5k	12	12	10	10
Rupees 6k -10k	59	59	63	63
Rupees >10k	29	29	27	27

Though the incomes reduced, the expenditure never took a turn of reducing instead the expenditure levels increased during the pandemic. The reasons may be numerous like the entire family staying at house so increase in food expenses, may be medication during pandemic etc. Before pandemic 12% of the respondents spent 3000 to 5000 rupees per month, 59% spent 6000 to 10000 rupees and 29% spent more than 10000 rupees on their household expenditure. During pandemic 10% of the respondents spent 3000 to 5000 rupees per month, 63% spent 6000 to 10000 rupees and 27% spent more than 10000 rupees on their household expenditure.

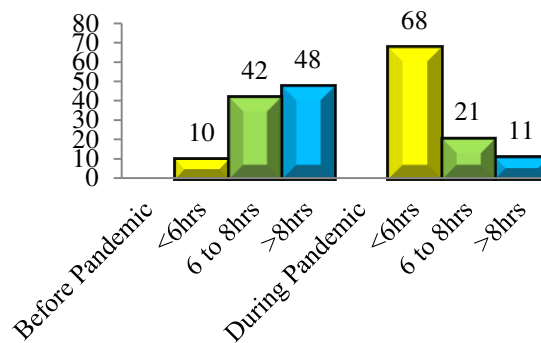


Chart 6 Business hours

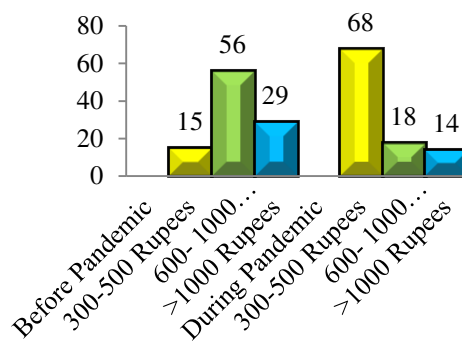


Chart 7 Income per day

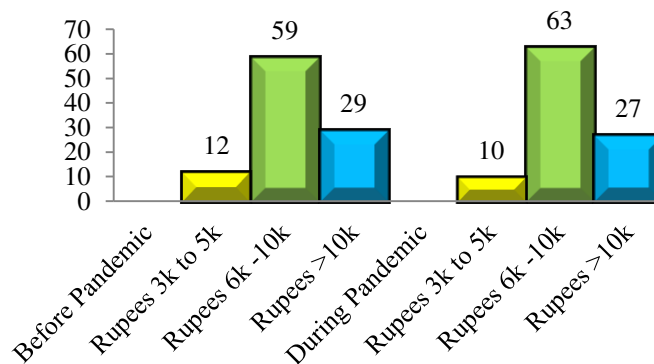


Chart 8 Monthly expenditure

d) **Impact of lockdowns on the livelihood**

Table 9 Impact of lockdowns on the livelihood		
	Number	Percent%
No impact	2	2
Average impact	3	3
Adverse impact	95	95

Table 10 Loss of income during lockdown		
	Number	Percent%
Yes	95	95
No	5	5



Though for most of the people working in white collar jobs in India lockdown gave a chance to spend with the family and work from home without an impact on their earnings, lock down had a drastic effect on the street vendors whose income is based on day to day sales.

According to the survey 2% of the respondents did not have any impact of the lockdown. 3% had average impact and 95% had adverse impact of lock down on their livelihoods. 95% of the respondents had loss of income and only 5% did not have any loss.

Table 11 Shutdown of business during lockdown	Number	Percent%
Yes	88	88
No	12	12

Table 12 Increase in debts due to lockdown	Number	Percent%
Yes	92	92
No	18	18

100% of the vendors who were surveyed had closed their business during lockdown According to the survey 95% of the respondents debts had increased and for only 5% it did not. The reason for increase in debts might be due to fall in incomes.(Table 7)

Table 13 Scarcity of food items during lockdown	Number	Percent%
Yes	73	73
No	27	27

As the people were not allowed to go out during the lockdown 87% of the respondents faced scarcity of food items during lock down and 13% did not face any scarcity of food items during lock down.

Table 14 Efforts made by the vendors to deal with and cope up post lockdown	Number	Percent%
Yes	100	100
No	0	0

Table 15 Ways in which the vendors dealt with the situation to cope up	Number	Percent%
Aids from different sources	18	18
Used Retained earnings	10	10
Selling the same products	72	72
Changed the business	0	0

As the vendors were badly affected by pandemic everyone (100%) who were surveyed made efforts to cope up with their situations post lock down. In order to cope up their situations 18% of the surveyed used aids from different sources. 10% used their retained earnings and 72% are selling the same product.

Table 16 Challenges faced during pandemic								
	Market closure		Lack of finance		Lack of demand		Repayment of debts	
	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %
Yes	85	85	88	88	83	83	92	92
No	15	15	12	12	17	17	8	8

As street vending is static business which they have been doing since ages, none of them changed their business or the products sold.

There were many challenges faced by the street vendors like 85% of the respondents suffered due to market closure, 88% due to lack of finance, 83% due to lack of demand and 92% faced the problem of repaying the debts. Due to lockdown the vendors who bought the goods in advance from wholesale markets could not repay them and also had suffered loss due to damage of perishable goods like vegetables, fruits and flowers.

On the other hand 15% of the respondents did not experience market closure, 12% did not face financial problems, for 17% demand remained the same and 8% did not have problem of repaying the debts.

Table 17 Position of the business after unlock stage				
	Frequency of customers		Demand	
	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %
Reduced	83	83	83	83
Remained same	17	17	17	17
Increased	0	0	0	0

After the unlock phases, frequency of customers and demand for 83% of the respondents reduced, this might be because of the fear of contracting Covid 19 on streets or less opening hours (Table 6) But for 17% it remained the same as they might be selling daily requirements. Overall in the unlock phase vendors did not experience any increase in business.

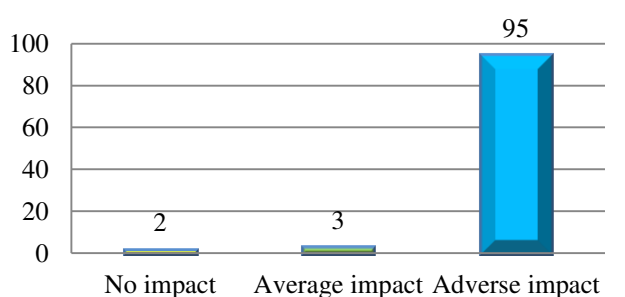


Chart 9 Impact of lockdowns on the livelihood

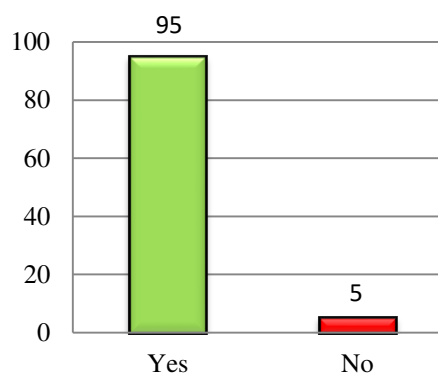


Chart 10 Loss of income

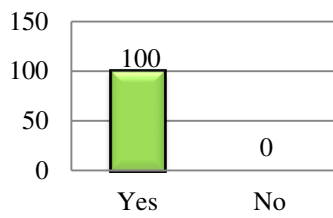


Chart 11 Shutdown of business

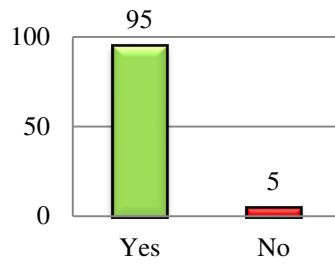


Chart 12 Increase in debts

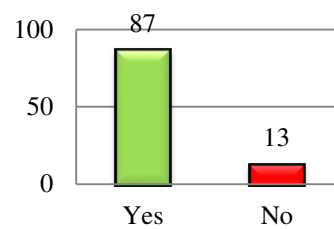


Chart 13 Scarcity of food items

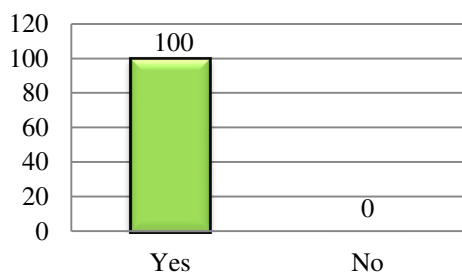


Chart 14 Efforts made by the vendors to deal with and cope up post lockdown

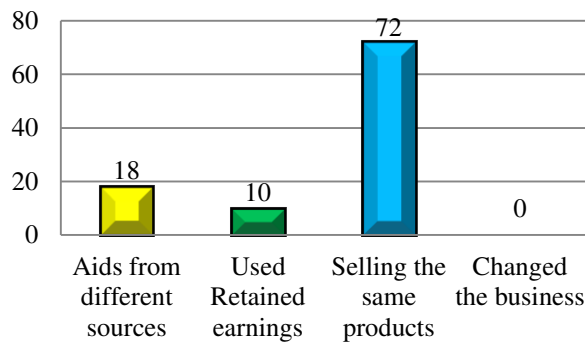


Chart 15 Ways in which the vendors dealt with the situation to cope up

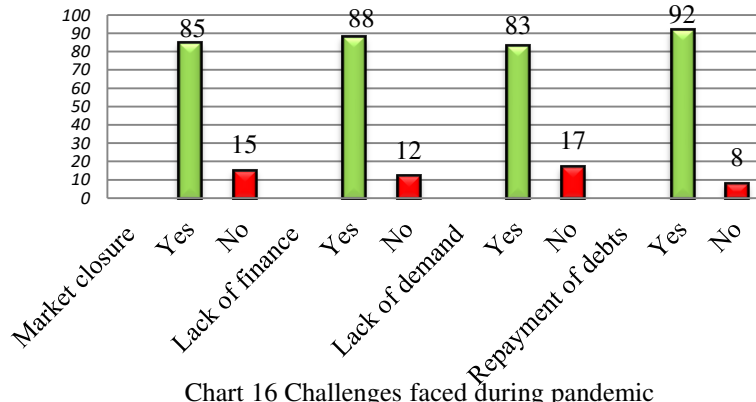


Chart 16 Challenges faced during pandemic

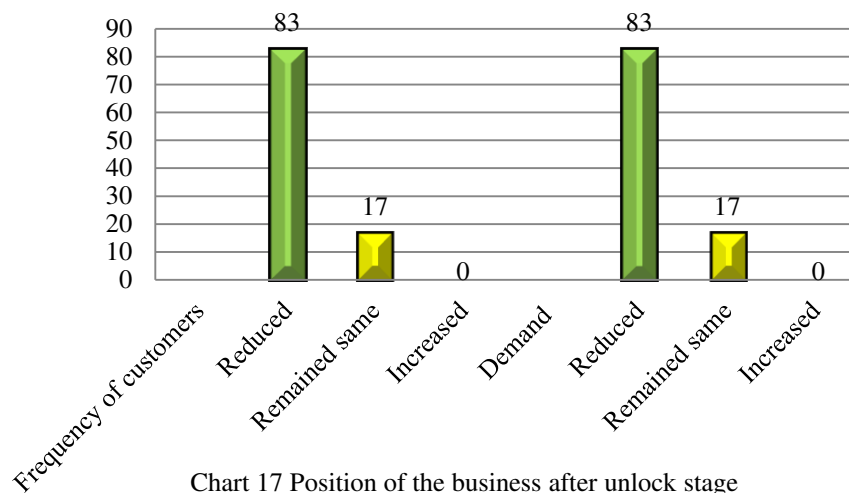


Chart 17 Position of the business after unlock stage

A conversation of 3 vendors (Vendors reluctant to reveal their identity) which have been recorded during the survey as follows:

Vendor 1 “We faced problems during the lockdown. We were not having any incomes for 2 months and we have to take loans for survival. Neither we nor our children have received any support from the State government.”

Vendor 2: “I haven’t received any help during the lockdown. I can survive only when I run the business”

Vendor 3: “My situation was better before Covid 19. For 3 months I have faced lots of difficulties. Haven’t received any assistance from the government. I have taken loans during this time. Except for free ration did not receive any help from any of the organisations or government. I can’t go to any other job except this. Even now not able to run the business in a full-fledged manner”

e) Legal Implications

Table 18 Legal Implications				
Knowledge about	Unorganised labour act (2008)		Street vendors act 2014	
	Number	Percent%	Number	Percent %
Yes	3	3	3	3
No	97	97	97	97

All the street vendors should be registered and are protected by law according to the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 and Street vendors Act 2014. But according to the survey 97% of the respondents are unaware of these acts. Only 3% of the respondents are aware of these acts.

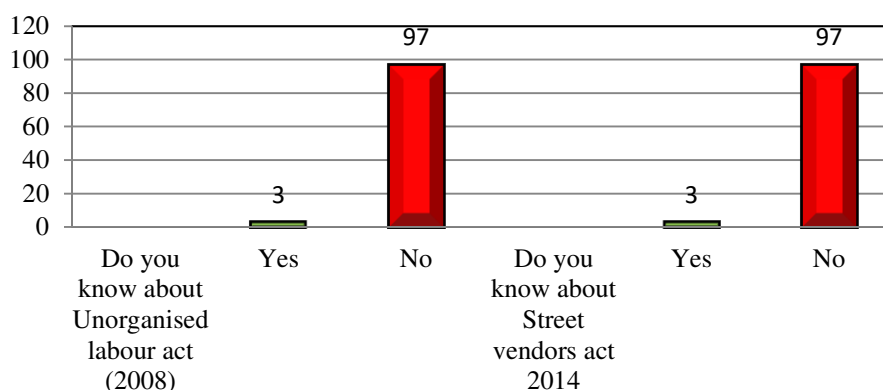


Chart 18 Legal Implications

f) Assistance during pandemic

Table 19 Financial Aids	Number	Percent%
From government	5	5
From NGO's/ Social organisations	2	2

Table 20 Received basic necessities	Number	Percent%
Yes	65	65
No	35	35

In June 2020 PM SVANidhi Scheme was launched by PM of India. It is a micro credit facility where in the street vendors can take a collateral-free loan up to 10000 rupees with a lower interest rate, on a repayment basis within one year in installments. (AnanyaTiwari, 2020) Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister had launched interest free loan scheme for street vendors in Andhra Pradesh. (ApparasuSrinivasaRao, 2020)

According to the survey only 5% of the respondents received help from the government and 2% from the NGO's/ social organizations. 65% of the respondents received basic necessities during pandemic, 35% did not receive basic necessities during pandemic

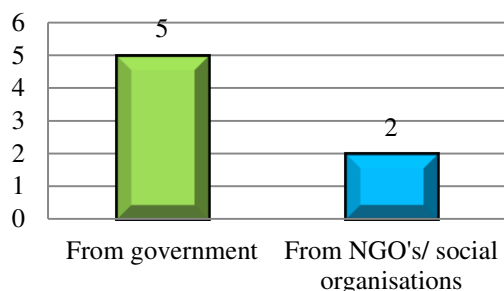


Chart 19 Financial Aid

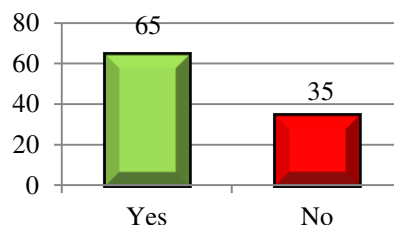


Chart 20 Received basic necessities

VIII. FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the survey:

1. Street vendors who are a part of Indian organized sector are people with low investments and incomes. With the increase in prices of essential goods, it is becoming difficult for them to cope up with the family expenses. Though we have a male dominated society, to cope up with the expense female vendors are also taking active role in street vending.
2. The pandemic situation had a worse affect on the street vendors. The lockdowns imposed had caused worst impact on the lives of them more than what was interpreted. Maximum street vendors had closed their business which affected them financially as they lost their daily income which increased their debts. Most of them suffered due to lack of basic necessities. As many street vendors are into this business since long time, a sudden closure of their business created havoc in their lives as their earnings were hampered.
3. Although the lockdowns disturbed the economic activities, most of the vendors tried to cope up the situations by using the aids from different sources and by using their savings. In spite of facing many challenges during these phases of lockdown most of the street vendors did not change their business.
4. Even after lifting up the lockdown most of the street vendors could not cope up with their financial situations as the business hours and the frequency of the customers were reduced which lead to reduce in demand so their earnings could not meet the expenses. Hence they are facing problems to repay the debts.
5. The aftermath of the post lockdown phase is worst than expected. As there were many unplanned restrictions at the business places, they are facing many unforeseen problems.
6. According to the survey very few street vendors got financial assistance from government/ NGO's/ social organizations. The government assistance did not reach most of them. Hence many of them relied on the different external sources due to which their debts had increased.
7. A positive factor observed was that most of the street vendors received basic necessities during the lockdown.
8. Though there are laws to protect the street vendors a maximum of them are not aware of these laws and the benefits that can be obtained from them.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Covid 19 Pandemic has shaken the complete world and hampered many economic activities. Indian economy too had a worst hit. Almost all the sections of the economy were hampered by this. A sudden outbreak of pandemic which lead to lockdowns had a worst hit on the street vendors most of them lost their earnings and it pummeled their livelihood. Though some sections of the economy resumed post lockdown with certain restrictions, it is very essential for the government to have an advance plan especially for those in unorganized sector like street vendors before going for such a lockdown as it affected them drastically. Most of them were even deprived of the basic necessities and were unable to meet the expenses due to lack of income. Government should make necessary arrangements to help them meet their financial needs and also look into it that it reaches them appropriately. Social groups should be arranged who can contact the affected and render the help. Even the Municipal corporations should minimize the restrictions so as to bring back their lives to normalcy by adhering to the Covid norms. An effective town vending committee should be established to reinforce the situations of street vendors.



X. CONCLUSION

Street vendors are vital subsection of Indian towns who contribute on a large scale to the self employment in our country- are the entrepreneurs who do the business with less capital but give a significant contribution to our economy. The street vendors who form a part of informal sector of the country sell all the required goods at affordable prices and liaison with the formal sector. The cities look lively because of them, but they face problems in running their business smoothly from the unforeseen situations. There are many factors which hamper their business that affects their livelihood. This survey focused on the lives of street vendors who have been facing hardships to face the unexpected and unforeseen situation of sudden lockdown. The pandemic situation brought a vast change in their financial situations and living conditions. In spite of facing the ongoing situations, most of the street vendors are still on the positive thought of running the same business and continue their lives in the street vending business itself. Even in the existing situations along with many regulations, they are still ready to serve the people by providing the services and products at affordable prices. They all have a positive expectation of financial assistance from the government which would replenish their lives so that they can extent their contribution to the economy in an effective manner.

Note: -- The source for all tables and charts: Primary Field survey conducted

Photos for the cover page are clicked during the survey with the consent of the vendors.

Recordings of the vendors:



Vendor 1.m4a



Vendor 1 part 2.m4a (Command Line)



Vendor 2.m4a (Command Line)



Vendor 3.m4a (Command Line)

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