Impact Of Covid-19 On The Lives Of Street Vendors In Kamrup Metro, Assam

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ABSTRACT
The Street vendors are the important segment of our economy which has significant contribution in the economic growth of the nation. The paper attempts to assess the impact of covid on the lives of street vendors of Kamrup Metro. The study is emphasized on 500 street vendors which have been selected by the researchers using snow-ball sampling technique. The researchers have also reviewed different articles and papers so as to collect information about the street vendors operating in Kamrup metro of Assam. The study found that the nationwide lockdown have severely affected the entrepreneurial life of the street vendors, small retailers, the pathway traders and other small business operators of the region which has led to the downfall of their business activities and which has also resulted in the decrement in the number of street vendors in the region. The street vendors have faced problems like loss in sales, disruption of distribution channels, shortage of raw materials, shortage of staff, financial problems, delay in payments of salaries and wages, psychological ill-health of workers, lack of institutional and government support.

Keywords: MSME, Petty Entrepreneur, Street vendors, Pathway traders.

INTRODUCTION
Street vendorship growth drives the structural transformation from a traditional economy to a modern economy, creates new enterprises, absorbs surplus labour from the agriculture sector, and raises productivity and employment in both the modern and traditional sectors, all of which contribute to low-income, developing economies’ economic growth (Anokhin & Schulze, 2009). Street vendors generate and increase the innovation levels across the economy. The success of street vendorship depends upon several factors. The attitude, perception, cognitive and social
behaviour affects the important elements of entrepreneurial process (Cumming et al., 2014; Estrin et al., 2020). Micro, small, and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) play a critical part in India's economic development. MSMEs, according to the RBI, are "enterprises involved in providing or rendering services and whose investment in equipment original cost excluding land and building and furnishings, fittings, and other items not directly relevant to the service supplied or as may be notified under the MSMED." Finance is the most important input for any firm, no matter how big or little. To develop and thrive, all businesses require funding. External sources of finance include loans, equity injections, subsidies, and government grants, whereas internal sources include generated cash flows and held funds. Initially, many businesses are self-funded. External financing becomes available once a company's product range and client base have reached a particular level of maturity. The flow of institutional funding is determined by the company's creditworthiness. Micro businesses, due to their tiny size and poor capital foundation, typically find it difficult to meet the bank's requirements (Bhattacharya & Londhe, 2014). Following the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 as a global public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020 (WHO 2020), governments in many countries, as well as multilateral development banks, launched rapid policy responses, including support for vulnerable micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Despite the announcement of large-scale economic stimulus programmes, the pandemic's economic effects spread quickly over the globe. In June 2020, the ADB and the International Monetary Fund had to modify downward the GDP growth estimates. The measures taken to contain Covid-19 has affected many households in different ways including job loss, loss of remittances, higher prices of food products and other commodities, and disruptions in the health care services and the Education sector (Sonobe et al., 2021). The people living in rural areas have minimum exposure to the disease which also comes with the limited access to the health care services. The experience of affected countries suggests that the incidence and the impacts of covid19 can vary significantly across the space and over time, with the urban areas being the hardest hit initially but the poorer strata’s of the society are the ones who are badly affected by this deadly disease. At the same time, governments’ capacitiate to quickly provide income support to affected households is seen very limited. The global workforce is at risk of losing their livelihoods. Informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lacks social protection and access to quality health care which also have resulted in losing access to productive assets. Millions of agricultural workers whether waged or self employed or anyone engaged with the agricultural sector have seen high levels of poverty, malnutrition, poor health and have suffered from lack of labour protection. Similarly, the small street vendors have faced risks in their transport, working and living conditions and struggle to access support measures of our respective governments. When the normalcy was prevailing, the street vendors and the street vendors had captured a market and their livelihoods seemed to be stabilized and a regular source of income was generated. The street vendors through their operations had been living their lives in a competitive environment where maintaining sustainability is a daunting task. When there was normal times prevailing at work places, the healthy environment aroused the street vendors for aggressive operational activities. So, the small
street vendors continue to be an integral part of an economy contributing to the regional development and growth.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

(Ratten, 2020) found that managing the Covid-19 crisis is difficult for street vendorship educators to promote street vendorship education due to the need for practical and real life examples. (Salamzadeh & Dana, 2021) analyzed the challenges faced by the startup organizations of Iran during the pandemic and found six principles affecting them. The data were collected from primary sources (which included observations, interviews and focus groups) and secondary sources which were in the form of websites, press releases, reports and data bases of world economic forum. It also becomes important to study the impact of the pandemic on the most significant sectors of Northeast such as Agriculture, Healthcare, Education, Tourism, etc. (Kaur, 2021) studied about the business related issues faced by the textile street vendors of Punjab due to Covid-19. Factor analysis and regression analysis have been used for the purpose of analysis which found that the major business-related issues included the radical effect on the working capital of the business and on future marketing campaigns to seek new orders were faced by the street vendors. The study proved to be a maiden attempt to unleash the early impact of COVID-19 on the textile industry in Punjab. (Ullah, 2021) focused on the impact of covid lockdown on the street vendors and their livelihoods in Bangladesh. The study found out that due to the pandemic many street vendors had to shut down their business for which their financial stability was severely hampered during the lockdown phases and even after the unlock phases. (Meahjohn & Persad, 2020) studied about the adverse effects faced by the newly formed businesses and startups in the International arena due to the Covid pandemic which led to their compulsion of downsizing their working staff and as a result affecting the global supply chain. (Walter, 2020) studied about the impacts of the pandemic on the present labour and employment conditions of the nation through a secondary research work from the existing database and ILO reports.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Considering the existing literatures of the study, the following are the objectives of the study.

- To study the impact of covid-19 on the lives of street vendors of Kamrup Metro.
- To study the sustainable measures taken by the street vendors during the lockdown and post lockdown period.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study is descriptive and exploratory in nature. It describes the existing conditions of street vendors in Kamrup Metro during the advent of the pandemic. The study also explores the unknown facts relating to the conditions of the street vendors in Kamrup Metropolitan district of Kamrup Metro. The research work has been conducted using both primary and secondary sources of information. Since the population of street vendors is unknown, therefore the researchers attempted to select the samples using non-probability snow ball sampling technique. The study on
the livelihood of street vendors is limited to 500. A structured questionnaire has been used to collect the responses from the street vendors. The researchers have also used the information available in journals, research papers, articles and websites which are focusing on the economic conditions of street vendors after the advent of covid.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The current study was prepared emphasizing on the street vendors of Kamrup Metro. The paper focuses on the available research papers concerning the street vendors affected by the pandemic. The study may also require further modification in order to broaden the current area of study which can be continued by other researchers. The study can be useful in the research diversification of other areas of economy. The paper sets a basis and can be helpful for other researchers as it will provide an insight to the researchers.

DISCUSSION

The Kamrup Metro state became a major trade and commerce hub, being the gateway to northeast India. The River Brahmaputra played a significant role in the transportation of goods to and from the state which has resulted in the development of markets like Fancy bazar, Machkhowa and Uzan bazar. Street vendors have always been a part of the state’s informal economy. Kacharighat market, one of the oldest markets of Kamrup Metro was run by vendors, small traders and farmers who came with food grains, vegetables and poultry items on bullock carts and boats. The vendors traveled to the state using modes of transport like trains, buses or shared pick-up vans. Many vendors started living in the state, near the market in cheap rented accommodation so that they could sell their commodities till late evenings regularly. This pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and it presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and work life of the state of Kamrup Metro. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating where huge number of people of the region is at risk of falling into extreme poverty. Border closures, trade restrictions and confinement measures have been preventing street vendors from accessing markets, including for buying inputs and selling their produce, and agricultural workers from harvesting crops. As per studies, the severity of the Covid pandemic on the Kamrup Metro’s economy has predicted that nearly half of the state’s population maybe pushed into poverty if the present crisis continues. As per researches made earlier, the breadwinners of the Kamrup Metro region have lost jobs, fallen ill and died and the food security and nutrition of the people are under continuous threat. A huge number of agricultural workers are still regularly face high levels of working poverty, health and suffer from a lack of safety and labour protection.

In order to locate and analyse the problems of the street vendors, the researchers have attempted to record the responses in a questionnaire which has been developed from various studies. The street vendors were asked to provide ratings on different statements on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Disagree.

Table 1: Responses of street vendors regarding covid impact on their livelihood
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The advent of covid has led to the discontinuation of your business operations and services</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The lockdown period during covid has decreased the sale of your products</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The covid has disrupted the distribution channels and supply chain of your products and services</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Covid has created shortage of raw materials of your inputs</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>There has been shortage of your staff and co-workers during the pandemic</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>There have been difficulties in the payment of salaries and wages to the workers and employees during lockdown</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>There has been continuous financial problems during the pandemic which still persists</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Covid has also caused for the mental deterioration of your workers</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>There hasn’t been any support received by you from the government</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Because of the pandemic many street vendors have taken exit from the market</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table it can be witnessed that the advent of covid has led to the discontinuation of your business operations and services with a mean score of 4.60 of the respondents. The street vendors have agreed with a mean score of 4.67 that the lockdown period during covid has decreased the sale of their products. According to the street vendors the covid pandemic has disrupted the distribution channels and supply chain of their products and services with a mean score of 4.36. With a mean score of 4.12, the street vendors agreed that Covid has created shortage of raw materials of their inputs which is being used by them in their businesses. With a mean score of
4.32 the street vendors also agreed to the fact that there has been shortage of the staff and co-workers in their business. The street vendors strongly agreed with a mean score of 4.63 that there have been difficulties in the payment of salaries and wages to the workers and employees during lockdown. The street vendors strongly agreed with a mean score of 4.81 that there have been continuous financial problems during the pandemic which still persists. The covid 19 has also badly affected the physical and mental health of the street vendors. This is reflected in their response with a mean score of 4.12 stating that Covid has caused for the mental deterioration of their workers. According to the responses made by the street vendors, the researchers interpreted that the street vendors of Kamrup metro didn’t receive any financial aid from the government. With a mean score of 4.22, the street vendors agreed that the government has provided no assistance to the street vendors. With a mean score of 4.40, the street vendors agreed that because of the pandemic many street vendors have taken exit from the market

The Kamrup Metro state has seen various street vendors such as shopkeepers, small retailers, street vendors and other small business units facing economic hardships in the lockdown stages during this pandemic which is still persisting. This has also led them to close down their entities and units and even change their mode of occupation. The Tea stalls owners, small rice shops and biryani walas who cater to the most of the office goers, daily workers alongside the daily college going students. As they provide daily meals at affordable prices and have established themselves as a necessary organ of the busy metropolis’ everyday functioning. However, months of lockdown have changed things completely as the street hubs in Kamrup Metro like fancy bazar, kachari, panbazar, and beltola outlets are not the same anymore. Though they have restarted their shops post unlock phase, but the sales aren’t the same like before. The economic hardships faced by the street vendors are in relation to sale or handling customers or working as per the standards of the authorities concerned. As per studies, it was found that majority of the street vendors of Kamrup Metro were male and very few of them are female street vendors. Majority of the small street vendors are side walkers who rely on street foods, kirana stores, small road-side outlets, vegetable shops, etc. And the outburst of this pandemic has created economic disruption of this mass of people who rely on the daily economic sales. Majority of the street vendors have left the work of being street vendors and have made efforts to change their way of earning. Nevertheless the problems which are faced by the street vendors cannot be decreased immediately as the loss is immense and for mitigating and healing the problems will require a significant amount of time. Although the loss suffered by the street vendors cannot be exactly determined in financial terms still it can be assumed that as street vendors, the Lockdown had a severe ill bearing on their financial aspect which cannot be neglected at all.

FINDINGS

As the study is based on other evident researches, it was found that many small street vendors had to shut down their units due to lack of sales and also as per the recommendations of authority. This led to a widespread loss to the street vendors of the region. When the lockdown phase was continuous for a longer period of time, the economic hardship of the street vendors were seen at
an optimum level because regular earning to most of the street vendors seemed a distant reality but some also have evolved from it with constant positivity. Even during the unlock phases, though economic activities kick started in the region but majority of street vendors faced crisis situation which had left some street vendors to shift from their regular course of action to different available earning alternative (Bezbora, 2021). But the resumption of activities due to the unlock phases has also seen financial crisis conditions faced by many street vendors, as the lack of finance was the main problem which got hit to many street vendors and daily earners of the region. The pandemic has brought financial depression and mental stress among the street vendors such as the street vendors and the daily earners (Chandra Kalita, 2021). (Fairlie, 2020) indicated that many street vendors lost their lives as starvation hit them leading to the loss of their livelihoods.

From the field study it can be interpreted that the introduction of covid has resulted in the discontinuation of the business operations and services of the street vendors with a mean score of 4.60 of the respondents. The street vendors agreed, with a mean score of 4.67, that the lockdown period during covid reduced their sales. The covid pandemic, according to street vendors, has disrupted the distribution channels and supply chain of their products and services, with a mean score of 4.36. The street vendors agreed, with a mean score of 4.12 that Covid has caused a shortage of raw materials for their inputs, which they use in their businesses. With a mean score of 4.32, the street vendors also agreed that there was a staff and coworker shortage in their business. With a mean score of 4.63, the street vendors strongly agreed that there had been difficulties in paying salaries and wages to workers and employees during the lockdown. The street vendors strongly agreed, with a mean score of 4.81, that there were ongoing financial problems during the pandemic, which continue to this day. The covid 19 has also had a negative impact on the physical and mental health of street vendors. This is reflected in their response, which received a mean score of 4.12 and stated that Covid has caused mental deterioration in their employees. According to the responses of the street vendors, the researchers concluded that the Kamrup metro's street vendors did not receive any financial assistance from the government. The street vendors agreed, with a mean score of 4.22, that the government has provided no assistance to them. The street vendors agreed, with a mean score of 4.40, that due to the pandemic, many street vendors have left the market.

CONCLUSION

As the pandemic has hit all the sectors of the economy but it is pretty obvious that the poorer sections of the society are the ones who are hardly hit by this pandemic. Especially the daily goers and the pathway traders are the ones who are severely affected due to the continuous restrictions of the government during both lockdown and unlock phases. When lockdown was initiated across the country, the street traders and other street vendors like dairy farmers had to limit their day to day activities and shut down their units, which forced them to face economic hardships (Barua, 2021). This made their living conditions havoc as they were not used to such conditions and some were even deprived of living the basic necessities of life. The government aids which are being provided to the needy ones should be delivered in a systematic manner by developing a mechanism.
in delivering those aids as the middlemen and the other fraudulent intermediaries attempts to obtain those aids and hence those street vendors gets deprived of receiving those financial help. The paper also suggests that the respective governments should make attempts to provide securities in the operation of the economic activities of the small businessmen and street vendors so that they can achieve success in their conduct. Street vendors are small street vendors who play a vital role in the development of a nation’s economy. Though they operate in a much smaller platform with little investment but their significance is much more to consider. To be precise, these small street vendors have to face too many difficulties in their day-to-day operational activities say in terms of arranging finance, attracting and handling customers or increasing the sales of the firm (Stephan et al., 2021). It also created many problems for every human being, but most severe was the case with the poorer sections of the society. So was the case with the street vendors like street vendors and the pathway traders who has minimal business activities to sustain in this competitive environment. But in spite of the grave problems face by these street vendors their positive attitude also helped many to protect themselves from this pandemic with regard to their business activities.

REFERENCES


