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Socio-economic Status and Challenges among Street Vendors: A Sociological Study of Selected Markets of Lucknow City

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Abstract: *Street vendors play a crucial role in the informal economy, contributing to urban livelihoods while facing socio-economic challenges. This study explores the socio-economic background, business operations, and daily struggles of street vendors in Lucknow, focusing on the Bhootnath and Sector 17 markets. Employing a descriptive and exploratory methodology, data was collected from 110 vendors across categories such as vegetables, fruits, cosmetics and beverages. The objectives include analyzing the growth of street vending at national and state levels, identifying major challenges like financial and operational constraints, and evaluating government policies. The findings highlight gender disparities, age-group concentration among younger individuals, and systemic inequities affecting minorities. Vendors face intense competition, long working hours, economic insecurity, and limited access to financial schemes like the Savanidhi Scheme. While many value the economic independence vending provides, a significant number aspire to shift to alternative livelihoods. This study underscores the need for inclusive policies, skill development programs, and better financial support to enhance the socio-economic conditions of street vendors.*

Key words : Street vendors, informal economy, socio-economic background, challenges, independence

Street vending, a deeply entrenched facet of Indian society, has long served as a source of livelihood for countless individuals. Images of men delivering newspapers, children selling diyas and malas, and women offering fruits and vegetables are emblematic of this profession. Despite their significant contributions to urban economies, street vendors have historically been marginalized, often labeled as illegal service providers. The rise of market economies often leads to the disembedding of traditional livelihoods from their social and cultural contexts (Polanyi, 1944). This observation resonates with the struggles of street vendors, who face mounting challenges due to the competition posed by modern retail formats, such as malls, marts, and online marketplaces. Street vending, a deeply entrenched facet of Indian society, has long served as a source of livelihood for countless individuals. Images of men delivering newspapers, children selling diyas and malas, and women offering fruits and vegetables are emblematic of this profession. Despite their significant contributions to urban economies, street vendors have historically been marginalized, often labeled as illegal service providers. The rise of market economies often leads to the disembedding of traditional livelihoods from their social and cultural contexts (Polanyi, 1944). This observation resonates with the struggles of street vendors, who face mounting challenges due to the competition posed by modern retail formats, such as malls, marts, and online marketplaces.

Globalization and technological advancements have transformed consumer preferences, creating a stark contrast between traditional markets and modern retail spaces. Globalization, as an intensification of worldwide social relations, has reshaped local economies and urban livelihoods (Giddens, 1990). While modern retail offers convenience and variety, it has marginalized traditional vendors, who must navigate shrinking urban spaces dominated by corporate retail interests. Informal economies persist despite globalization, as they cater to the needs of low-income groups while existing in tension with formal markets (Sassen, 2001).

India's rapid population growth has exacerbated the challenge of generating sufficient employment opportunities in the formal sector. Consequently, a significant portion of the workforce is absorbed into the informal economy, with street vending emerging as a prominent means of survival. Informal sector activities provide critical livelihood opportunities for urban populations (Hart, 1973). Street vendors contribute to preserving cultural heritage by offering traditional goods and services. However, urban restructuring often prioritizes capitalist interests, displacing such traditional practices. Women vendors, in particular, face compounded challenges due to unsafe working conditions and systemic inequities, reflecting the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism (Walby, 1990).

In Lucknow, the street vending sector holds particular significance. Vendors contribute substantially to the local economy by offering affordable goods to middle- and low-income groups. However, their living and working conditions are precarious, marked by harassment, eviction threats, and limited access to essential resources. The emergence of large-scale retail outlets, driven by globalization, has further marginalized this vulnerable community, threatening their livelihoods and cultural relevance. This study



investigates the socio-economic realities of street vendors in Lucknow, with a focus on the Bhootnath municipality, an area witnessing a growing presence of vendors. By examining their working environment, socio-economic status, and quality of life, the research aims to highlight the potential for improving their livelihoods through adequate support and resources. Street vendors represent a vital component of the urban informal economy, capable of achieving a better quality of life if given access to ethical, legal, social, and economic safeguards. This paper seeks to explore these dimensions, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by street vendors in Lucknow's rapidly evolving urban landscape.

Theoretical Perspective: This research draws upon the conflict theory lens, a sociological framework inspired by Karl Marx's critique of capitalism. Conflict theory posits that society is fundamentally characterized by inequalities and power struggles between different social groups. These struggles arise from competition for resources, opportunities, and control.

In the context of street vending, this perspective highlights how vendors, often operating outside the formal economy, experience exploitation and marginalization by dominant economic and political forces. Similar to how Marx described the exploitation of industrial workers, street vendors can be seen as a marginalized labor force facing precarious conditions and limited access to formal protections and benefits. This research further draws on the work of scholars like Marcuse and Harvey, who expanded upon conflict theory by examining the control of urban space and the economic exploitation of marginalized groups within cities. Marcuse argued that cities are not merely spaces for living but also sites of social control, where the interests of the powerful are enforced through various means, including the criminalization and marginalization of informal economic activities. Harvey emphasized how urban spaces are often shaped to serve capitalist interests, creating exclusionary environments for those who do not fit within the formal economic system. By applying the conflict theory lens, this research aims to understand the structural forces that contribute to the vulnerability of street vendors in urban settings, such as Lucknow. It will examine the conflicts between vendors and authorities, shedding light on the ways in which power imbalances and social control mechanisms impact the livelihoods and well-being of this marginalized group.

Review of Literature: Francie (1998), in her research titled "Women Street Vendors in Urban South Africa: A Synthesis of Selected Research Findings," explored the experiences of women street vendors in the Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD) and the Durban metropolitan area. The study highlighted that education levels among vendors were notably low, with significant gender disparities observed.

Bhowmik (2005), in his study "Street Vendors in Asia: A Review," analyzed the prevalence and conditions of street vending across various Asian countries, including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand (Bangkok), Singapore, and others. The study found a rising number of street vendors in these nations. It revealed that many vendors operated without licenses due to government restrictions on issuing them. About 92% of vendors reported paying bribes to local authorities, surrendering 10–20% of their earnings. Furthermore, vendors lacked access to institutional credit and faced challenges in preserving unsold goods.

Anjaria (2006), in his paper "Street Hawkers and Public Space in Mumbai," investigated the lives of street vendors in Mumbai. The research revealed that many former mill workers and their families in central Mumbai districts had turned to hawking as a means of survival after losing formal employment.

Dimas (2008), in his study "Street Vendors: Urban Problem and Economic Potential," examined the origins of street vending and proposed solutions based on global best practices for managing street vending. The research emphasized that street vendors posed challenges for urban management, with city authorities often seeking to remove them for aesthetic reasons. Dimas stressed the need for a shift in the mindset of urban policymakers to address these issues effectively.

Kuskabe (2010) conducted a study on street vendors in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, highlighting its importance as an occupation for rural-to-urban migrants. Despite its significance, vending was viewed as an undignified profession due to low earnings, leading to a lack of recognition. Women were predominant in this sector as vending spaces were seen as extensions of household responsibilities.

Nirathron (2010) explored street vending in Bangkok, focusing on its role in providing affordable, nutritious food to low-income groups. Many vendors sold small quantities of food, catering to people who lacked the time or resources to cook. Although some areas were officially designated for street vending, unauthorized vending persisted. The study also noted that street vending served as a primary occupation for slum dwellers and those displaced from formal employment during economic crises. However, unauthorized vendors often faced harassment from authorities due to weak unionization.



Nidan (2010), in a study on street vendors in Patna, Bihar, surveyed 600 vendors across 72 wards. The findings indicated that most respondents had entered the vending profession due to a lack of alternative job opportunities, low entry barriers, and minimal investment requirements. The study also highlighted the challenges faced by female vendors, particularly the lack of safety measures, toilet facilities, and childcare support.

Baba Saheb (2011) studied the living conditions of 360 women street vendors in Visakhapatnam who sold vegetables and fish. The study found that the average monthly per capita income of these vendors' households was only ₹1,007, placing them below the poverty line. Around 57% of these vendors were rural-to-urban migrants who had moved based on recommendations from relatives. Illiteracy was prevalent among the women vendors, and their daily profits averaged ₹106, with literate vendors earning higher profits due to better working capital availability.

Objectives

1. To study the socio-economic background of street vendors in Lucknow city.
2. To identify the major challenges faced by street vendors, with a focus on financial and operational constraints.
3. To examine the business dimensions and daily struggles of street vendors in Lucknow.
4. To evaluate government policies toward street vendors and suggest measures for their improvement.

Significance of the Study: Street vendors play a vital role in contributing to the national economy by providing affordable goods and services, yet they remain excluded from the formal recognition of workers under labor laws. This exclusion systematically marginalizes them, leaving them vulnerable to various socio-economic and legal challenges. While several studies have explored the conditions of street vendors in Lucknow, they have largely overlooked the deeper realities of their lives and the effectiveness of existing laws designed to protect their rights and minimize their hardships.

This research is significant as it seeks to address these gaps by delving into the socio-economic conditions, challenges, and policy frameworks impacting street vendors in Lucknow. By examining the implementation and effectiveness of laws and policies related to street vending, the study aims to provide insights into the shortcomings of existing mechanisms and offer practical recommendations to improve the livelihood and security of street vendors. This makes the study a unique and valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Research Methodology: The research employs a descriptive and explanatory design, aiming to provide a thorough understanding of the vendors' demographic and professional characteristics while exploring the broader socio-economic issues that affect them. Data collected covers aspects such as educational qualifications, business operations, and the difficulties vendors face in their line of work. The study aims to offer insights that can inform policy recommendations and improve the working conditions of street vendors in Lucknow.

The present study was conducted in the Bhootnath and Sector 17 market areas of Lucknow, where a significant number of street vendors engage in selling various goods, with a large proportion selling vegetables. This study is both descriptive and exploratory in nature, aiming to understand the socio-economic profile, challenges, and conditions of street vendors in these areas. The study's sample consists of 100 street vendors who operate in these two locations, providing a focused and detailed analysis of their profiles and operations.

The research encompasses a variety of street vendors in Lucknow, including vegetable vendors, fruit vendors, cosmetic vendors, beverage vendors, and others, totaling approximately 110 vendors across these categories. By focusing on these areas, the study delves into the different types of goods sold, as well as the educational background, professional experiences, and personal details of the vendors. It also identifies the challenges faced by these vendors in their daily work, including issues related to their economic, social, and legal circumstances.

Result and Discussion:

Nature of Business	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Vegetables Vendors	11 (14.8%)	6 (16.7%)	17 (15.3%)
Fruit Vendors	9 (12.6%)	4 (11.1%)	13 (12%)
Beverage Vendors	3 (4%)	1 (2.8%)	4 (3.5%)
Fast Food Vendors	10 (13%)	5 (13.9%)	15 (13.6%)

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents by Nature of Business and Gender

Cosmetic Vendors	9 (12.6%)	4 (11.1%)	13 (12%)
Mobile accessories Vendors	8 (11%)	4 (11.1%)	12 (11%)
Clothes/ Footwear Vendors	7 (9%)	4 (11.1%)	11 (10%)
Others	17 (23%)	8 (22.2%)	25 (22.6%)
Total	74 (67.3%)	36 (32.7%)	110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data
Paratheses indicates Percent

The table 1 highlights the gender distribution and nature of businesses among street vendors, showing significant male dominance, with 67.3% of the respondents being men and 32.7% women. Men are primarily engaged in diverse vending activities, with the highest participation in the "Others" category (23%) which include balloon sellers, flower sellers, toys and utensils sellers etc., followed by fast food vending (13%) and vegetable vending (14.8%). Women, on the other hand, have a notable presence in vegetable vending (16.7%), fast food vending (13.9%), and cosmetics vending (11.1%), reflecting their involvement in accessible and community-oriented activities. The data reflects traditional gender roles, where men dominate a broader range of vending jobs, while women are concentrated in specific niches requiring lower capital investment. This disparity highlights the need for support and empowerment programs to address barriers faced by women street vendors and enhance their participation in various vending activities.

S.No.	Age in Years	Frequency
1	Below 25 years	05 (4.5%)
2.	25-35 years	40 (36.4%)
3.	35-45 years	40 (36.4%)
4.	45-55 years	16 (14.54%)
5.	Above 55 years	09 (8.2%)
	Total	110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data
Parenttheses indicates Percent

Table 2 highlights the age distribution of street vendors, ranging from 25 to above 50 years. The highest concentration of vendors is observed in the 25–35 and 35–45 age groups, collectively accounting for 36.4% of the total. Notably, the majority of vendors are concentrated in the 25–35 age group, reflecting a preference for or necessity of participation in vending activities during early adulthood. As age increases, the number of vendors declines, with 14.54% in the 45–50 age group and only 8.18% above 55 years. The median age of vendors is 33.08 years, emphasizing the predominance of young and middle-aged individuals in this occupation. This pattern underscores age stratification, a sociological concept that illustrates the inequalities linked to age-based roles and statuses in society. Age stratification can lead to ageism, a form of social inequality stemming from discrimination or bias based on age. Such trends have broader implications for workforce dynamics, societal norms, and public policy. Age plays a crucial role in shaping life transitions, such as entering or exiting certain professions, and shifting societal perceptions of aging can exacerbate inequalities.

Table 3
Distribution of Respondents by Religion and Educational level

Education Level	Religion				Total
	Christian	Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	
Illiterate	1 (20%)	16 (21%)	4 (18.2%)	1 (14%)	22 (20%)
Primary	1 (20%)	18 (24%)	6 (27.2%)	2 (29%)	27 (24.5%)
Secondary	1 (20%)	21 (27%)	6 (27.2%)	2 (29%)	30 (27.4%)
Higher Secondary	1 (20%)	10 (13.5%)	3 (14%)	1 (14%)	15 (13.6%)
Degree	0	8 (10.5%)	2 (9%)	1 (14%)	11 (10%)
Diploma	1 (20%)	3 (4%)	1 (4.4%)	0	5 (4.5%)
Total	5 (4.5%)	76 (69%)	22 (20%)	7 (6.5%)	110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

The table reveals significant disparities in educational attainment across different religious groups. Hindus demonstrate a higher representation at all educational levels, culminating in a substantial majority of 69% in higher education (Diploma and Degree levels). In contrast, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs have lower representation, with Muslims having the highest percentage of illiterate individuals (18.2%). These disparities likely reflect a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors, historical discrimination, cultural norms, and government policies. For instance, the lower representation of Muslims and Christians in higher education might be linked to historical and contemporary socioeconomic disadvantages, while the overrepresentation of Hindus could indicate better access to resources or systemic advantages within the Hindu community

Table 4

Reason for choosing Vending as a occupation

S.No.	Reason	Frequency
1.	Poverty	27 (24.5%)
2.	Lack of Employment Opportunities	13 (12%)
3.	Family Tradition	09 (8.9%)
4.	Absence of earning member in Family	25 (23%)
5.	Death of Parents	04 (3.6%)
6.	Voluntarily Engaged	24 (21%)
7.	Other reasons	08 (7%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

Table 4 provides valuable insights into the motivations behind individuals choosing street vending as their occupation. Poverty (24.5%) and lack of employment opportunities (12%) emerge as the most significant driving factors, aligning with sociological literature on the link between socioeconomic deprivation and informal sector employment. The influence of family context is also evident, with family tradition (8.9%) and the absence of an earning member in the family (23%) playing crucial roles. Interestingly, a substantial proportion (21%) voluntarily engage in street vending, suggesting that it can also be a viable and preferred livelihood option for some individuals. These findings have important implications for policymakers and urban planners in developing strategies to support street vendors while addressing the underlying socioeconomic challenges that contribute to their participation in this sector.

Table 5

Working Hours of the Street Vendors

S.No.	Working Hours	Frequency
1	Less than 5 hours	10 (9%)
2	5-8 hours	53 (48%)
3	8-12 hrs	28 (25.4%)
4	More than 12 hrs	19 (18%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

Table 5 highlights the distribution of working hours among street vendors, offering insights into the labor conditions within this informal sector. The data reveals a significant proportion (48%) of vendors work for more than 12 hours per day, suggesting a demanding and potentially exploitative work schedule. This finding aligns with sociological literature on the precarious nature of informal employment, often characterized by long hours, low wages, and limited social protections. The presence of a substantial portion of vendors working between 8 and 12 hours (25%) and between 5 and 8 hours (25%) indicates a range of

working hours, potentially influenced by factors such as the nature of their goods or services, seasonal variations in demand, and personal circumstances.

Table 6
Problem Faced by the street vendors

S.No.	Problems Faced by Street Vendors	Frequency
1	Health Related	12 (11%)
2	Economic Problem	34 (31%)
3	High Competition	29 (26%)
4	Wastage of product	14 (6%)
5	Misbehavior	6 (5%)
6	Municipal Corporation	2 (2%)
7	Feeling of Insecurity	6 (5%)
8.	Others	8 (7%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

The above table reveals a multifaceted set of challenges faced by street vendors. "High Competition" emerges as the most significant concern (31%), highlighting the intense rivalry among vendors for limited space, customers, and resources. "Wastage of Product" (26%) poses a substantial economic threat, particularly for those selling perishable goods. "Misbehavior" (13%), likely encompassing harassment, intimidation, or unfair treatment, underscores the social exclusion and discrimination faced by street vendors. Other challenges include "Economic Problems" (11%), such as low income and limited access to credit, and "Health-Related Issues" (7%), stemming from long working hours and exposure to harsh conditions. These findings underscore the precarious nature of street vending, characterized by economic vulnerability, social exclusion, and challenging working conditions.

Table 7
Respondents Buy the Product from

S.No.	Place of Buying Product	Frequency
1.	Chinhat Cold Storage	08 (7.3%)
2.	Bakshi Ka Talab	07 (6.4%)
3.	Yahiyaganj	29 (26.4%)
4.	Aminabad	17 (15.4%)
5.	Others	49 (44.5%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

This table presents the distribution of where respondents purchase the products they sell as street vendors. "Others" emerge as the most common source, accounting for a substantial 44.5% of respondents. This category likely encompasses a wide range of sources, including local markets, wholesalers, and direct sourcing from producers. "Yahiyaganj" is the second most frequent source (26.4%), suggesting it might be a significant wholesale market or a hub for procuring goods in the region. "Aminabad" (15.4%) and "Bakshi Ka Talab" (6.4%) are also identified as sources, while "Chinhat Cold Storage" (7.3%) appears to be a less common source for the respondents.

Table 8
Government Help to the Respondents

S.No.	Has Government ever help	Frequency
1.	Yes	21 (19%)
2.	No	89 (81%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

arentheses indicates Percent

Table 8 sheds light on the extent to which street vendors perceive receiving support from the government. A significant majority (81%) of respondents report not having received any government assistance. This finding suggests a significant gap in government support for this vulnerable population. The lack of government aid could be attributed to various factors, including limited awareness of available schemes, bureaucratic hurdles in accessing support, and insufficient outreach programs targeting street

vendors. This situation highlights the need for increased government intervention and targeted support programs to address the specific needs and challenges faced by street vendors.

Table 9
Awareness About Savanidhi Scheme

S.No.	Awareness About Savanidhi Scheme	Frequency
1	Yes	71 (64.5%)
2	No	39 (35.5%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

Table 9 explores the awareness of street vendors regarding the "Savanidhi Scheme," a government initiative aimed at providing micro-credit facilities to street vendors. While a majority (64.5%) are aware of the scheme, a significant proportion (35.5%) remain unaware. This suggests that there is room for improvement in disseminating information about the scheme and reaching out to a wider segment of the street vendor population. Lack of awareness can hinder access to crucial financial support and limit the scheme's effectiveness in empowering street vendors.

Table 10
Future aspirations of Street Vendors

S.No.	Plan for the Future	Frequency
1	To do the same occupation	68 (62%)
2	To do something else	42 (38%)
Total		110 (100%)

Source: Primary Data

Parentheses indicates Percent

Table 10 provides insights into the future aspirations of street vendors. A majority (62%) plan to continue with their current occupation, indicating a strong attachment to street vending as a livelihood option. This could be attributed to various factors, such as lack of alternative employment opportunities, limited skills, and the perceived advantages of self-employment. However, a considerable proportion (38%) plan to pursue other occupations, suggesting a desire for alternative livelihood options and a willingness to explore new avenues. This finding highlights the need for skill development programs, entrepreneurship training, and support for transitioning into other sectors for those who wish to pursue alternative livelihoods.

Conclusion- The study of street vendors in Lucknow offers a deep understanding of their socio-economic realities, challenges, and aspirations. It highlights clear gender disparities, with men dominating a variety of vending activities while women are confined to roles requiring lower capital investment, reflecting ingrained societal norms. Age distribution trends show that younger and middle-aged individuals make up the majority of vendors, underscoring the lack of formal employment opportunities that push many into this informal sector. Disparities in education among religious groups further reveal systemic inequities, particularly for minorities like Muslims and Christians, who face limited access to resources and opportunities. Street vending, though growing rapidly at both national and state levels, comes with significant challenges. Vendors grapple with intense competition, product wastage, economic insecurity, and health risks, all of which point to the precariousness of informal labor. Many work over 12 hours a day, reflecting the demanding and often exploitative nature of this occupation. While government initiatives like the Savanidhi Scheme aim to provide financial support, their limited awareness and reach among vendors reduce their effectiveness, leaving a gap in the system.

Interestingly, the aspirations of street vendors show a dual pattern. While a majority plan to continue vending, valuing the economic independence it offers, a substantial number aspire to move into other livelihoods. This highlights the need for targeted interventions such as skill development programs and better access to financial resources, enabling vendors to explore alternative opportunities if they choose. In conclusion, street vendors in Lucknow represent a complex intersection of economic survival, cultural traditions, and social challenges. Their resilience and contributions to the urban economy are undeniable, yet their vulnerabilities demand immediate attention. Addressing these issues through inclusive policies and sociological insights is essential to ensure a fair and supportive environment for this vital workforce.



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