



Physical and Infrastructural Challenges of Street Vendors: An Urban–Rural Analysis with Special Reference to Manipur

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ABSTRACT

Street vending is an important source of livelihood for a large section of the informal workforce. However, women vendors faced various physical and environmental hardship while operating their business. This study examines the physical constraints faced by street vendors due to (i) exposure to air and noise pollution, (ii) lack of basic facilities such as shelter, sanitation, and storage, and (iii) transportation-related problems. Primary data were collected from 483 street vendors residing in urban and rural areas of Manipur. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used to analyse whether place of residence significantly influences these constraints. The findings reveal that more than four-fifths of vendors experience physical difficulties due to pollution, while nearly half report problems arising from the lack of basic facilities. Transportation-related problems were reported by a smaller proportion of vendors. Statistical results show no significant association between place of residence and any of the selected constraints. The study concludes that occupational hardships faced by street vendors are widespread and not limited to either urban or rural settings. The findings highlight the need for inclusive policies focusing on pollution control, provision of basic amenities, and better infrastructural support for street vendors in Manipur.



1. Introduction

Street vending plays a vital role in the informal economy by providing employment opportunities to low-income groups and ensuring the supply of affordable goods and services to consumers. In India, street vending is a major source of livelihood for unskilled and semi-skilled workers who are unable to access formal sector employment. Vendors commonly sell vegetables, fruits, cooked food, clothes, footwear, and household items, and their activities contribute to urban food security and local trade.

In Manipur, street vending is widely practiced in market areas, roadside locations, and weekly bazaars such as Mao Market and Liangmai Keithel. A large proportion of vendors are women who combine income-generating activities with household responsibilities. Many vendors originate from rural and hill districts and travel to market centres to sell agricultural produce and forest-based goods.

Despite its economic significance, street vending is associated with difficult working conditions. Vendors operate in open and congested spaces and are exposed to vehicular emissions, dust, and noise. Seasonal rainfall, flooding, and lack of drainage further aggravate their working environment. The absence of basic facilities such as shelters, toilets, and storage spaces leads to physical discomfort and health risks. Transportation of goods from production centres and wholesale markets is another challenge, particularly for vendors from remote rural areas.

In contemporary urban and rural environments, environmental pollution has become a major occupational hazard, particularly for those who conduct their businesses in outdoor settings. Among these groups, street vendors are especially vulnerable due to their constant exposure to air and noise pollution in high-traffic areas such as congested city streets or bustling rural markets. The nature of their work places them at the forefront of environmental stressors that may impact their physical health and overall well-being. Given the informal and unregulated nature of street vending, vendors often lack protective measures against pollution, making it imperative to assess how prolonged exposure affects them. This analysis seeks to explore the extent to which these vendors experience physical constraints due to pollution and whether their place of residence—whether in an urban or rural setting—plays a role in shaping these experiences. Urban–rural differences are often assumed to influence occupational conditions; however, empirical evidence on whether residential location significantly affects physical constraints remains limited. This study attempts to fill this gap by analysing pollution exposure, infrastructural inadequacies, and transportation-related problems faced by urban and rural street vendors in Manipur.



2. Review of Literature

Several studies have highlighted the difficult working conditions of street vendors in developing countries. Bhowmik (2010) observed that street vendors operate in highly insecure environments and face continuous harassment, lack of infrastructure, and exposure to pollution. Roever and Skinner (2016) emphasized that informal vendors remain excluded from urban planning processes, which worsens their access to basic services.

Environmental risks faced by informal workers have been widely documented. According to Chen (2012), street vendors working in traffic-congested areas are particularly vulnerable to air and noise pollution, which can affect their respiratory health and overall well-being. Mitullah (2003) found that vendors in open markets often suffer from physical strain due to long working hours and exposure to harsh weather conditions.

Studies on infrastructure-related challenges indicate that lack of shelter and sanitation remains a major concern. Bromley (2000) argued that absence of storage and toilet facilities increases occupational stress among vendors and reduces their productivity. Skinner (2008) noted that poor access to basic amenities forces vendors to adopt unsafe practices, affecting both health and hygiene.

In the Indian context, studies by Saha (2011) and Kundu (2018) showed that street vendors face similar problems in both urban and semi-urban areas, suggesting that spatial location alone does not fully explain their vulnerability. However, region-specific studies, especially from North-Eastern states like Manipur, remain scarce. This study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from Manipur on whether residential location influences physical constraints faced by vendors.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To study the problems faced by street vendors because of the lack of basic facilities such as shelter, sanitation, and storage.
- To analyse whether these physical and infrastructural problems differ between urban and rural street vendors in Manipur.

4. Methodology

The study is based on primary data collected from 483 street vendors of Ima Market, Manipur. Respondents were classified into urban (129) and rural (354) categories based on their place of residence.



Information was collected on whether vendors experienced physical constraints related to pollution, basic facilities, and transportation.

Responses were recorded in binary form (Yes/No). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse percentages, and chi-square tests of independence were applied to determine whether a significant association exists between place of residence and each category of constraint.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 5.1: Physical Constraints due to Air and Noise Pollution

Response	Urban	Rural	Total
No	25	64	89
Yes	104	290	394
Total	129	354	483

$$\chi^2 = 0.106, p = 0.744$$

Source: Calculated from primary data

The dataset utilized in this study comprises survey responses from street vendors categorized by their place of residence. Several key variables have been analysed to assess how air and noise pollution affect their work conditions. One of the primary variables is perceived physical constraints, where vendors were asked to indicate whether they experience limitations due to pollution. Their responses were classified into two categories: those who reported experiencing constraints and those who did not. Another essential variable is the vendors' place of residence, which differentiates between those living in urban and rural areas, allowing for comparative analysis. The study's findings indicate that a substantial proportion of vendors, regardless of their location, report experiencing pollution-induced physical constraints. The analysis shows that a very large proportion of street vendors experience physical problems due to air and noise pollution, irrespective of whether they live in urban or rural areas. About 80.6% of urban vendors and 81.9% of rural vendors reported pollution-related difficulties, indicating that this problem is widespread. The chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 0.106, p = 0.744$) confirms that there is no statistically significant association between place of residence and pollution-induced physical constraints. This suggests that exposure to pollution is a common occupational hazard for street vendors in Manipur.



and is not influenced by their urban or rural location. These findings underscore the fact that pollution is a pervasive occupational hazard affecting vendors across both urban and rural environments.

Table 5.2: Physical Constraints due to Lack of Basic Facilities

Response	Urban	Rural	Total
No	71	186	257
Yes	58	168	226
Total	129	354	483

$$\chi^2 = 0.237, p = 0.627$$

Source: Calculated from primary data

Table 5.2 shows that a substantial number of both urban and rural street vendors experience physical constraints due to inadequate basic facilities such as shelter, sanitation, and storage. Among urban vendors, 58 out of 129 reported such difficulties, while 168 out of 354 rural vendors reported similar problems. The chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 0.237, p = 0.627$) indicates that there is no statistically significant association between place of residence and these infrastructural constraints. This suggests that deficiencies in basic facilities affect street vendors in both urban and rural areas in a similar way. The findings imply that lack of shelter, sanitation, and storage is a common problem across locations, pointing to the need for uniform and comprehensive policy measures to improve basic amenities for street vendors irrespective of their residential background.

Table 5.3: Physical Constraints due to Transportation Problems

Response	Urban	Rural	Total
No	112	313	425
Yes	17	41	58
Total	129	354	483

$$\chi^2 = 0.228, p = 0.633$$

Source: Calculated from primary data



Table 5.3 indicates that only a small proportion of street vendors face transportation-related physical constraints. About 12% of the total respondents reported transportation difficulties, while nearly 88% did not perceive transportation as a major problem. The proportions of urban (13.2%) and rural (11.6%) vendors experiencing such constraints are very similar. The chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 0.228$, $p = 0.633$) shows no statistically significant association between place of residence and transportation-related constraints. This suggests that transportation problems are not determined by whether vendors live in urban or rural areas but are more likely influenced by factors such as market location, quality of transport infrastructure, and nature of goods sold. Overall, transportation-related challenges appear to be evenly distributed across both groups rather than concentrated in either urban or rural settings.

6. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The study highlights the need for comprehensive policy measures to improve the working conditions of street vendors in Manipur. Priority should be given to developing designated and covered vending zones with proper drainage and waste management in order to reduce exposure to pollution and weather-related hardships. The provision of basic amenities such as toilets and safe drinking water in market areas is essential for safeguarding the health and dignity of vendors, particularly women. For vendors operating from remote locations, affordable and subsidized transport services can help lower costs and minimize losses. Street vending should be formally integrated into urban and rural development plans so that vendors are recognized as legitimate economic participants rather than treated as encroachers. Finally, effective implementation of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 is crucial to ensure legal protection, reduce insecurity, and improve access to institutional support for street vendors in Manipur.

7. Conclusion

The study reveals that street vendors in Manipur face considerable physical constraints due to pollution exposure and lack of basic facilities. These problems are not limited to either urban or rural areas. Statistical analysis confirms that place of residence does not significantly influence the level of physical hardship experienced by vendors. The findings highlight that occupational vulnerability among street vendors is widespread and structural in nature. There is an urgent requirement for well-designed policy measures that focus on enhancing environmental quality, ensuring access to essential amenities, and incorporating street vending into broader development strategies in order to promote a more sustainable and inclusive growth path for Manipur.

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