



Socio-Emotional and Structural Constraints Faced by Street Vendors in Imphal City

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ABSTRACT

Street vending is a crucial livelihood strategy in Indian cities, especially in contexts where formal employment opportunities are limited. In Imphal City, street vendors contribute to the urban economy by supplying affordable goods and services, yet they remain vulnerable to social stigma, humiliation, and misbehaviour in everyday public space. This paper examines one dimension of social constraint among street vendors in Imphal City, namely whether vendors experience humiliation and misbehaviour during the course of vending. The study uses survey data from 483 vendors, divided into urban and rural residence categories. The findings indicate that 90.9 percent of respondents reported no humiliation or misbehaviour, while 9.1 percent reported that they had experienced such treatment. A chi-square test shows no statistically significant relationship between place of residence and reported humiliation or misbehaviour, $\chi^2 = 1.056, p = 0.304$. The result suggests that social mistreatment is not primarily shaped by residential location, but by broader structural conditions associated with informality, governance practices, and contested urban space. The paper situates these findings within the legal and policy framework of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 and related studies on street vendors in India and Imphal. It concludes that effective implementation of legal protections, grievance redressal mechanisms, and public awareness measures are necessary for improving the dignity and security of street vendors in



Introduction

Street vending is one of the most visible forms of informal employment in Indian cities. It provides essential goods and services at affordable prices and absorbs workers who might otherwise remain excluded from the formal labour market. Yet street vending is also marked by insecurity, congested space, weak regulation, and frequent social discrimination. In many cities, vendors must constantly negotiate with police, municipal authorities, licensed shopkeepers, and customers in order to sustain their livelihood.

In Imphal City, street vending has a particularly important social and economic role. The city's major market spaces have historically depended on women vendors and informal traders and the growth of roadside vending has intensified conflicts over space, congestion, hygiene and regulation. Although street vendors contribute to urban life, they often operate without full legal protection and are be exposed to humiliation, verbal abuse, and other forms of misbehaviour. These social constraints matter because they affect not only income but also dignity, self-worth and the ability to sustain their livelihood.

The present study focuses on humiliation and misbehaviour as a measurable social constraint. This issue is important because harassment can be subtle and may not always appear in economic indicators alone. The paper uses survey data from 483 vendors to examine whether such experiences differ by place of residence and to interpret the pattern in light of the broader literature on street vending in India and the regulatory environment in Manipur.

Literature Review

Street vending has been widely studied as a livelihood strategy in the informal economy. Chen (2001) argues that informal women workers are often doubly disadvantaged because they face both economic insecurity and weak social recognition. Bhowmik (2003) shows that urban street vendors in India are routinely excluded from policy protection despite their contribution to the urban economy. These broader patterns are visible in many Indian cities where vendors are seen as “encroachers” even when they provide important public services.

Research in other developing-country contexts also shows that street vendors must constantly negotiate access to public space. Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah (2008) document how street vendors in Accra face periodic displacement and conflict over trading areas, while Milgram (2011) highlights how legality and



livelihood often collide in the everyday regulation of vending. Similar processes are evident in Imphal, where street vendors navigate tensions among municipal order, market competition, and livelihood survival.

The literature on Imphal specifically points to strong gender dimensions. Salimuddin's study on women street vendors in Imphal reports conflict with city authorities, harassment by police, and disputes between licensed vendors and roadside vendors over vending space. Reports on women street vendors in Imphal also note that the lack of formal recognition and the absence of effective institutional support leave vendors vulnerable to arbitrary eviction and social abuse. These studies make clear that vending in Imphal is not merely an economic activity but also a social struggle over legitimacy, space, and dignity.

At the policy level, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 was introduced to protect vendors' rights and regulate vending through surveys, vending certificates, Town Vending Committees, grievance redressal mechanisms, and safeguards against harassment. Government statements further confirm that the Act requires States and Urban Local Bodies to conduct periodic surveys and facilitate the inclusion of vendors in welfare and social security measures. However, there remains a persistent gap between legal provision and actual implementation. In practice, many vendors continue to experience harassment, eviction pressure, and social exclusion even when the law formally recognizes their rights.

Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which street vendors in Imphal City experience humiliation and misbehaviour.
2. To test whether place of residence is associated with reported social mistreatment.
3. To situate the findings within the broader literature on informal work, urban governance, and vendor protection in India.

Research Methodology

The study is based on survey data from 483 street vendors. The sample is divided into urban and rural residents, allowing comparison of reported social constraints by place of residence. The key variable analysed here is whether the vendor experienced humiliation or misbehaviour while carrying out vending activities. The attached material reports the distribution of responses and a chi-square test of association.



The analysis is descriptive and inferential in nature. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the proportion of vendors who reported mistreatment, while the chi-square test is used to determine whether the observed pattern differs significantly between urban and rural vendors. The study is limited to one social constraint variable presented in the attached data, but the discussion broadens the interpretation using published research and policy sources.

Table - 1: Social constraints on the humiliation and misbehaviour

Response from street vendors	Place of residence		Total
	Urban	Rural	
No	117	322	439
Yes	12	32	44
Total	129	354	483
Chi-square test	$\chi^2=1.056, P=0.304$		

Source: Calculated from primary source

Results

The data show that among 129 urban vendors, 117 respondents (90.7 percent) said they did not experience humiliation or misbehaviour, while 12 respondents (9.3 percent) said they did. Among 354 rural vendors, 322 respondents (91.0 percent) reported no such experience, while 32 respondents (9.0 percent) did. In total, 439 vendors (90.9 percent) reported no humiliation or misbehaviour, while 44 vendors (9.1 percent) reported that they had experienced it.

The chi-square test result is $\chi^2 = 1.056$ with $p = 0.304$. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, the association between place of residence and experience of humiliation or misbehaviour is not statistically significant. This means that the difference between urban and rural vendors is too small to conclude that residential location shapes exposure to social mistreatment in a systematic way. Social humiliation appears to be distributed across vendors in a more general manner rather than being tied to whether they live in urban or rural areas.

Interpretation

The most important implication of the finding is that social constraints faced by street vendors in Imphal are not simply a function of residence. Rather, they are likely embedded in the broader structure of informal vending, including the status of the vendor, the nature of the vending site, and interactions with



authorities and customers. In other words, mistreatment is a feature of the vending environment itself, not merely of where the vendor comes from.

This interpretation is consistent with the literature on street vending in India. Vendors often work in public space without stable recognition, which makes them vulnerable to ridicule, removal, and verbal abuse. In Imphal, the problem is intensified by conflicts over market spaces, roadside congestion, and inconsistent enforcement. The study by Salimuddin shows that police eviction, tensions with licensed vendors, and disputes over space are common parts of the vending experience in the city. The data therefore fit a broader pattern in which informal workers are socially visible but institutionally weak.

The fact that only 9.1 percent reported humiliation or misbehaviour should not minimize the issue. Even a smaller share matters because humiliation can damage confidence, reduce customer interaction, and make vendors feel unsafe or unwelcome in public space. For women vendors in particular, such treatment may interact with gendered burdens, household responsibilities, and economic dependency, thereby amplifying vulnerability.

Discussion

The findings can be read in relation to the Street Vendors Act, 2014, which explicitly includes protection from harassment and recognizes the rights of street vendors to conduct business with dignity. Section 27 of the Act specifically addresses prevention of harassment by police and other authorities, while sections on grievance redressal and Town Vending Committees are intended to create institutional channels for fair regulation. Yet the policy environment described in the literature suggests that implementation remains incomplete in many locations, including Manipur.

A major point emerging from the Imphal literature is that street vending is deeply tied to contested urban space. The city's markets are not neutral spaces; they are socially regulated, historically embedded, and politically charged. Vendors therefore face not only economic competition but also moral judgments about who has the right to occupy public space. This helps explain why humiliation and misbehaviour may occur even when formal residence background does not matter statistically. The issue is less about where vendors live and more about how they are positioned within urban hierarchies.

The findings also have implications for social policy. If mistreatment is structurally rooted, then isolated enforcement actions will not resolve the problem. Instead, there must be formal recognition of vending zones, transparent grievance systems, regular consultation with vendors, and routine training for



municipal and police personnel. Without these measures, vendors may continue to face informal pressure and symbolic exclusion even when they remain vital to the city's economy.

Policy Recommendations

First, the Government of Manipur and Imphal Municipal authorities should fully operationalize the Street Vendors Act, 2014 through the formation and active functioning of Town Vending Committees. These committees should include vendor representatives, municipal officials, and local stakeholders so that decisions on vending zones and relocation are participatory rather than arbitrary.

Second, a formal grievance redressal mechanism should be created specifically for street vendors. Such a mechanism should allow vendors to report harassment, humiliation, illegal seizure of goods, and abusive behaviour without fear of retaliation. This is especially important in spaces where vendor-police interaction is frequent and where social mistreatment can become normalized.

Third, awareness programmes should be introduced for police personnel, municipal staff, and the public. These programmes should emphasize that street vendors are not nuisance actors but workers contributing to the city's economy and food security. Public recognition is important because social dignity often shapes daily livelihood outcomes as much as formal policy.

Fourth, future urban planning in Imphal should integrate vending into the city's spatial design. Instead of displacing vendors, authorities should identify vending-friendly spaces, improve sanitation and waste management, and design circulation patterns that reduce conflict between vendors, pedestrians, and shopkeepers. This would help align urban order with livelihood protection.

Conclusion

This paper examined the social constraint of humiliation and misbehaviour among street vendors in Imphal City using survey data from 483 vendors. The results show that most vendors did not report such mistreatment but a meaningful minority did and the experience was not significantly associated with place of residence. This suggests that social constraints are structural and institutional rather than simply residential.

The broader literature on Imphal and India shows that street vendors work in contested public spaces shaped by weak legal enforcement, social stigma, and recurring conflict over vending rights. The Street Vendors Act, 2014 provides a strong rights-based framework, but its practical implementation remains



essential if vendors are to work with dignity and security. A more inclusive urban governance approach is therefore necessary if Imphal is to support both order and livelihood.

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