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## A Contemporary Study Identifying Problems Faced by Street Vendors around Palani

\*<sup>1</sup>R Dinesh and <sup>2</sup>Dr. S Maruthavijayan

\*<sup>1</sup>2<sup>nd</sup> Year Student of B.B.A, LLB(HONS), School of Excellence in Law, Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Human Resource Management, School of Excellence in Law, Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

### Abstract

Street vending constitutes a vital part of India's informal economy, offering affordable goods and services while generating employment for millions of urban poor. Despite their socio-economic importance, street vendors remain among the most marginalized sections of society, often operating in insecure and unregulated environments. This study, conducted around the temple town of Palani, explores the multifaceted challenges faced by street vendors in maintaining their livelihoods. Using a structured questionnaire administered to fifty vendors across diverse categories—such as food sellers, fruit vendors, and garment traders—the research identifies recurring issues including eviction threats, harassment by municipal officials and police, lack of designated vending zones, poor sanitation facilities, and inadequate access to formal credit or welfare schemes. The analysis also reveals that most vendors are unaware of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which was designed to safeguard their rights. Furthermore, the absence of institutional support and health protection mechanisms aggravates their socio-economic vulnerability. By examining these dimensions through both quantitative and qualitative data, the study provides insights into the gap between policy and practice, emphasizing the need for stronger implementation of existing legal frameworks, community-level awareness programs, and inclusive urban planning. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on informal labor protection and advocate for sustainable, dignified livelihoods for street vendors in smaller urban centers like Palani.

**Keywords:** Street vendors, harassment, infrastructure, legal awareness, income stability, health issues.

### Introduction

Street vending is a vital part of India's informal urban economy, offering affordable goods and services to millions. In pilgrimage towns like Palani, vendors cater to both locals and visitors, providing food, clothing, and souvenirs. Despite their economic importance, they are often viewed as "encroachers," leading to conflicts with authorities and urban planners. These tensions reflect the broader neglect of informal workers in India's development framework.

The informal sector employs nearly 80% of India's workforce, yet street vendors typically operate without licenses, stable income, or social protection. In Palani, their livelihoods are affected by seasonal pilgrim flows, lack of proper vending zones, and frequent evictions. Most vendors face daily struggles with inadequate infrastructure, harassment, and limited access to credit and welfare benefits, making their existence highly precarious.

Although the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 recognizes vending as a legal activity, its implementation remains weak in smaller towns. Many vendors are unaware of their rights, and local

vending committees function poorly. This study examines these gaps through field-based research in Palani, aiming to highlight vendors' socio-economic challenges and propose measures for more inclusive and just urban governance.

### Review of Literature

Street vending, as a vital component of the informal economy, has attracted considerable academic attention across disciplines such as sociology, economics, and urban studies. The following literature review synthesizes the findings of ten prominent authors whose work collectively highlights the vulnerabilities, resilience, and policy neglect of street vendors.

1. **Bhowmik, Sharit K. (2005):** In his seminal work "Street Vendors in the Global Urban Economy", Bhowmik emphasizes that street vendors contribute significantly to urban economies by supplying affordable goods and services to the working class. However, he also observes that despite their economic importance, vendors remain marginalized, facing frequent evictions, police harassment, and absence of social security. His research

underscores the need for state-level policies that recognize vending as a legitimate livelihood rather than a nuisance.

2. **Chen, Martha (2012):** Martha Chen, a key researcher with WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing), examines how urban informality is linked with systemic exclusion from municipal planning. Her analysis reveals that vendors are excluded from city master plans, resulting in insecure working conditions. Chen advocates for integrating informal livelihoods into urban development policies to ensure equity and sustainability.
3. **Mitullah, Winnie V. (2006):** In her comparative study across African and Asian cities, Mitullah explores governance mechanisms affecting street vendors. She concludes that most local authorities treat vending as an illegitimate activity, which leads to conflict between vendors and law enforcement. The study calls for participatory urban governance where vendors have representation in decision-making processes.
4. **Roever, Sally (2014):** Roever's research focuses on the regulatory environment surrounding street vending in Latin America and Asia. Her findings highlight how ambiguous municipal laws allow for discretionary interpretation, resulting in exploitation and corruption. She stresses that legal clarity and vendor licensing systems are crucial to protecting their livelihoods.
5. **Chakraborty, Debraj (2017):** Chakraborty's study on informal trading in Kolkata demonstrates that street vending supports household economies but lacks institutional recognition. He identifies that vendors' contributions to the local supply chain remain invisible to policymakers. The study suggests formalizing vending through town vending committees, as prescribed under the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014.
6. **Singh, Nandita & Batra, Priya (2018):** In their paper "Urban Informality and Gendered Spaces", the authors examine the intersection of gender and informality. They note that women vendors often face dual marginalization — both economic and social. The research stresses the importance of gender-sensitive vending zones and safety measures for women in public markets.
7. **Krishnan, V. & Uma, R. (2020):** Their empirical study conducted in Madurai identifies occupational health hazards among street vendors. Long working hours, exposure to pollution, and lack of sanitation facilities are major contributors to chronic ailments. The study proposes periodic health check-ups and vendor health insurance schemes under local governance initiatives.
8. **Narayan, S. (2018):** Narayan investigates financial inclusion challenges within Tamil Nadu's informal sector. The study reveals that vendors largely depend on informal credit systems with exorbitant interest rates due to lack of access to institutional finance. He recommends micro-credit programs and cooperative banking tailored to small vendors' needs.
9. **Menon, R. & Kaur, H. (2021):** In their recent analysis of post-COVID economic recovery, Menon and Kaur highlight that street vendors were among the worst affected due to lockdowns and mobility restrictions. Their research underscores the need for digital literacy, mobile payment systems, and government-supported e-commerce platforms for vendor resilience in the post-pandemic era.

10. **Saha, D. (2022):** Saha's comprehensive study of street vending in pilgrimage towns in South India, including Palani, reveals that religious tourism significantly influences vending patterns and income cycles. However, vendors in such towns face unique challenges — seasonal income fluctuation, congestion, and municipal neglect. The study advocates for special vending policies in pilgrimage centers that balance regulation with livelihood protection.

### Synthesis of the Literature

The reviewed literature collectively identifies three recurring themes:

- i). **Legal and Institutional Neglect:** Despite national legislation like the 2014 Street Vendors Act, local authorities continue to view vending as illegal or encroaching. Authors such as Bhowmik (2005) and Roever (2014) stress that this perception perpetuates harassment and eviction.
- ii). **Socio-Economic and Health Challenges:** Krishnan & Uma (2020) and Narayan (2018) reveal that vendors face precarious earnings, unsafe work environments, and lack of health protection, which exacerbate poverty cycles.
- iii). **Gender and Governance Dimensions:** Studies by Singh & Batra (2018) and Mitullah (2006) emphasize the need for participatory governance and gender inclusion in vending regulation frameworks.

While substantial research exists on major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata, the micro-context of smaller pilgrimage towns such as Palani remains underexplored, marking the research gap this study seeks to fill.

### Research Methodology

**Type of Research:** Descriptive and exploratory

### Research Objectives

- i). To identify the major problems faced by street vendors in Palani
- ii). To examine vendors' awareness of legal rights
- iii). To propose recommendations to address identified problems

### Research Statement/Hypothesis

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Street vendors in Palani do not face significant harassment from authorities.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Street vendors in Palani face significant harassment and infrastructural constraints.

**Sample/Population Size:** 50 street vendors randomly selected from various market zones around Palani

**Sampling Technique:** Simple random sampling stratified by type of goods (food, fruits, household items, clothes)

**Data Type & Collection Technique:** Primary data via structured questionnaire (as per the form) and informal interviews; secondary data from municipal records

**Research Limitations:** Limited to vendors in Palani town only; responses based on self-reporting; time and resource constraints

**Research Gap:** There is sparse micro-level data about street vending issues in pilgrimage towns; this study intends to fill that gap.

### Data Analysis

The data were collected from 50 street vendors operating in

and around Palani town, primarily near the bus stand, temple vicinity, vegetable market, and surrounding streets. The sample included both stationary and mobile vendors dealing in food, fruits, household goods, clothes, and miscellaneous items. The data were tabulated, coded, and analyzed to identify the major issues affecting their livelihood, health, income, and legal awareness.

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of Respondent

| Demographic Variables     | Category                                           | No of Response | Percentage |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Gender                    | Male                                               | 32             | 64         |
|                           | Female                                             | 18             | 36         |
| Age group                 | Below 25 years                                     | 5              | 10         |
|                           | 25-40 years                                        | 22             | 44         |
|                           | 41-60 years                                        | 20             | 40         |
|                           | Above 60 years                                     | 3              | 6          |
| Educational qualification | Illiterate                                         | 14             | 28         |
|                           | Primary(up to 5 <sup>th</sup> STD)                 | 21             | 44         |
|                           | Secondary (6 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup> STD) | 12             | 24         |
|                           | Above 10 <sup>th</sup> STD                         | 3              | 6          |
| Types of vendors          | Stationary                                         | 34             | 68         |
|                           | Mobile                                             | 16             | 32         |

### Interpretation

The majority of vendors are male (64%) and belong to the age group 25–60 years, indicating middle-aged individuals dependent on vending as their main livelihood. Educational attainment is generally low; 70% have not studied beyond primary level. Stationary vending dominates due to proximity to the temple and bus terminus

**Table 2:** Income and Working Conditions

| Income Per Day | No of Response | Presentation |
|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Below ₹500     | 10             | 20           |
| ₹501-₹800      | 22             | 44           |
| ₹801-₹1000     | 11             | 22           |
| Above ₹1000    | 7              | 14           |

| Working Hours Per Day | No of Response | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------|
| 6-8 hours             | 12             | 24         |
| 9-10 hours            | 23             | 46         |
| Above 10 hours        | 15             | 30         |

### Interpretation

Nearly half of the respondents earn between ₹500–₹800 per day, working long hours averaging 10 hours daily. The income is unstable and fluctuates seasonally — increasing during pilgrimage months and dropping sharply otherwise.

**Table 3:** Correlation Analysis: Education vs Legal Awareness

| Education level             | Aware of 2014 Act | Not Aware | Awareness % |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Illiterate                  | 2                 | 12        | 14          |
| Primary                     | 4                 | 17        | 19          |
| Secondary                   | 5                 | 7         | 42          |
| Above 10 <sup>th</sup> srtd | 1                 | 2         | 33          |

### Interpretation

A positive correlation exists between education and legal awareness — better educated vendors are more likely to know about their rights and available schemes.

**Table 4:** Major problem faced by vendors:

| Problem Type                     | No of response | Percentage | Rate |
|----------------------------------|----------------|------------|------|
| Harassment by local authority    | 35             | 70         | 1    |
| Lack of proper vending space     | 28             | 56         | 2    |
| Income instability               | 30             | 60         | 3    |
| Health problem due to occupation | 22             | 44         | 4    |
| Lack of sanitation facilities    | 20             | 40         | 5    |
| Absence of safety                | 18             | 36         | 6    |
| Poor access to loan              | 15             | 30         | 7    |

### Interpretation

The most pressing problem is harassment from authorities (70%), followed by inadequate vending space (56%) and income instability (60%). These results align with previous studies on informal workers in small towns.

**Table 5:** Awareness and legal protection

| Awareness of the Street Vendors Act 2014 | No of Response | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Aware                                    | 12             | 24         |
| Not aware                                | 34             | 76         |

### Interpretation

Only 24% of respondents were aware of the 2014 Act, and merely 16% possess an official vendor ID card. This lack of legal awareness and recognition exacerbates their vulnerability to eviction and exploitation.

**Table 6:** Access to financial and institutional support

| Sources of working capital | No of response | Percentage |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Own savings                | 22             | 44         |
| Barrowed from friends      | 10             | 20         |
| Money lenders              | 12             | 24         |
| Self-help group            | 4              | 8          |
| Bank                       | 2              | 4          |

### Interpretation

A significant 68% rely on informal sources (savings or moneylenders). Only 4% accessed formal loans, highlighting weak institutional linkage and exclusion from mainstream finance.

**Table 7:** Health and occupational hazards

| Health Problem Type             | No of Response | Presentation |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Back pain                       | 18             | 36           |
| Respiratory issue               | 12             | 24           |
| Eye strain                      | 10             | 20           |
| Skin issues due to sun exposure | 7              | 14           |
| No significant health issues    | 2              | 6            |

### Interpretation

Majority (36%) suffer musculoskeletal problems due to long hours of standing or pushing carts. Poor air quality and lack of shade contribute to respiratory and dermatological issues.

**Table 8:** Gender based problem:

| Problem type               | Female Vendors | Percentage |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Safety concerns            | 9              | 50         |
| Lack of toilet facilities  | 12             | 67         |
| Balancing household duties | 15             | 83         |
| Access to finance          | 10             | 56         |

### Interpretation

Women vendors face dual burdens of work and domestic responsibility. 83% find it difficult to balance home and vending, while 67% cited lack of sanitation as a major issue.

**Table 9:** Vendors satisfaction leave:

| Satisfaction parameter      | Satisfied | Neutral | Dissatisfied |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|--------------|
| Earning                     | 10        | 8       | 32           |
| Relationship with officials | 6         | 7       | 37           |
| Work environment            | 12        | 10      | 28           |
| Access to customer          | 40        | 7       | 3            |

### Interpretation

Although most are satisfied with customer access, dissatisfaction levels remain high regarding income and official interactions, reflecting deep structural issues.

### Findings

The study reveals that harassment by local authorities remains the most significant issue faced by street vendors in Palani. Many respondents reported instances of eviction, confiscation of goods, or being forced to relocate without prior notice, which disrupts their daily income and sense of security.

Infrastructure-related problems are another major concern. Most vending areas lack essential facilities such as proper stalls, storage space, drinking water, sanitation, and shade. This not only affects business operations but also exposes vendors to harsh weather conditions and health risks.

Income instability is a persistent problem, particularly among those selling perishable or seasonal goods like fruits and vegetables. The fluctuation in demand, especially during non-festival months, leads to uncertain earnings and financial insecurity.

In terms of health issues, a majority of vendors reported suffering from back pain, fatigue, and respiratory problems due to long working hours, inadequate rest, and exposure to pollution. Despite these problems, access to healthcare or preventive measures is minimal.

The study also found that awareness of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 is very low — about 76% of respondents were unaware of its provisions. This lack of legal knowledge leaves vendors vulnerable to exploitation and limits their ability to claim their rights.

Finally, access to formal financial support remains extremely limited. Most vendors depend on informal moneylenders or personal savings to manage their working capital, often at high interest rates. The absence of institutional credit restricts their potential for business growth and stability.

### Suggestions

- Designated vending zones/street vendor parks with basic amenities (water, shade, storage)
- Awareness programs about the Street Vendors Act, legal rights, and support services

- Soft loans/microfinance schemes tailored for vendors
- Health camps/occupational safety initiatives focusing on ergonomics
- Regulation and monitoring of municipal authorities to reduce harassment
- Skill training in business management, product diversification

### Conclusion

Street vendors in Palani encounter a wide range of interrelated challenges that affect not only their livelihoods but also their overall well-being and dignity. The findings highlight how inadequate infrastructure, frequent harassment, unstable income, and limited legal awareness continue to marginalize this vital section of the informal workforce. Despite their important contribution to the local economy and tourism sector, their work remains largely unrecognized and unsupported.

To ensure sustainable livelihoods, there is a pressing need for stronger institutional mechanisms that guarantee vending rights, provide access to basic amenities, and promote financial inclusion. The effective implementation of the Street Vendors Act, 2014, along with active participation of Town Vending Committees, can help secure vending zones and reduce conflict with authorities.

Collaborative efforts among government agencies, NGOs, and local self-governments are essential to build an enabling environment that values vendors as contributors to urban life rather than as encroachers. By documenting the real-life experiences of street vendors in Palani, this study offers valuable micro-level insights that can guide policy reform, improve urban governance, and advance the broader goals of social justice and inclusive development.

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