

Impact of Covid-19 on Street Vendors: A Case Study of Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)

Princy Singh (Research Scholar)
Department of Commerce
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi

Prof. Ashok Kumar Mishra (Dean)
Faculty of Commerce & Management Studies
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi

Abstract:-

BACKGROUND: The shutdown was established as the COVID-19 pandemic developed as the primary preventive strategy to slow the virus's spread around the planet. India also had one of the most severe nationwide lockdowns, which primarily impacted workers in the unorganized sector. This study intends to investigate how the COVID-19 and lockdown have affected street sellers' ability to make a living in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

METHOD: Schedule were filled from 1st June to 30th June 2022 with 60 street vendors who sold perishable and non-perishable goods for their livelihood.

RESULT: There was a total of 60 street vendors in the study sample. The mean age of street vendors recorded was 35 years; the average years of working recorded were 9 years; the mean education level was 8.25; and the average household size recorded was 6. Out of the total street vendors, 44 were males and 16 were females. 83.33% of street vendors vaccinated which helps to prevent spread of Covid-19. The majority of the street vendors belong to the Varanasi city.

CONCLUSION: The study's conclusions indicate that lockdown has a wide range of effects on street merchants. Street vendors were forced to stop operating, and many of them were forced to switch to selling fruits and vegetables within a constrained time frame, which presented more difficult financial and life issues.

Keywords:- Street vendors, COVID-19, Varanasi, Lockdown, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

For earning livelihood, street vending is one of the major means in India, as it requires minor low initial investment and efforts in searching a job and the expertise concerned are low.

The street vendors lead a very difficult life.

- The mode of their travel and working hours, it provides hardly any time for rest and for relaxation, which creates adverse effects on their health.
- Increased traffic affects their mobility on main street.
- Pollution is affecting them in many ways, road widening also effect of street vendors.
- Harassment from local authorities or from policemen during vending.
- Uncertainty and insecurity are the basic problem of vendors as their profession is considered illegal.

- Vendors are not protected by government, NGO's, labor union by any labor laws.
- They are insecure due to their low income, irregular employment and their sale fluctuation.
- They are not getting easy financial assistance from bank due to their low income and fluctuation in income.
- Vendors needs some market amenities such as water toilet, storage or shades, waste disposal. (Karthikeyan, R., & Mangaleswaran, R., 2013)

A street vendor is broadly defined as a person who offers goods for sale to the public at large without having a permanent built-up structure from which to sell. Street vendors may be stationary in the sense that they occupy space on the pavements or other public/private spaces or, they may be mobile in the sense that they move from place to place by carrying their wares on pushcarts or in baskets on their heads. (National Association of Street Vendors of India, n.d.-b)

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2), also called coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), has taken the world by storm. World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO 2020). More than 200 countries are affected by this first non-influenza pandemic. The cumulative number of cases exceeded 13 million as of July 31, 2020. India is one of the severely affected countries with the number of cases rising every day and situation worsening rapidly (The Economist 2020a).

After the lockdown on March 24, 2020, Centre and State governments issued various guidelines which regulated the vegetables and fruits vendors to sell goods within restricted time slots (The Times of India 2020; The Hindu 2020b). Similarly, other economically vulnerable groups such as food vendors were barred from the essential goods services during the initial phase of lockdown, which impacted their livelihood considerably (SEWA 2020). Current COVID-19 allows studying the consequences of the pandemic on human lives and livelihood which should not be wasted. These studies will help us to prepare for future pandemic which is not going to be uncommon (Sundaraman 2020). In this context, current research aims to study the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on the livelihood of street vendors in Varanasi.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, there have been limited studies available on street vendors which have explored this dimension.

There are no clear definitions of street vendors. Their attitudes and needs are unknown. There is no basis to describe its social and economic dynamics, turning street vendors into a segregated sector from the rest of the population with no guarantee of respect for their human rights, such as food, work, and health. The situation worsens when one of the most significant impacts that the pandemic has had has been the decrease in families' net income, which gives them less purchasing power of necessities such as food. [Laborde D, Martin W, Swinnen J, Vos R (2020) COVID-19 risks to global food security. *Science* 369:500–502]

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the impact of covid-19 on income of street vendors.
- To evaluate the effect of covid-19 on family of street vendors.
- To observe the means of income of street vendors during pandemic.
- To examine what types of help were provided by government to street vendors.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Street Vending is one of the fundamental constituents of urban economies and also a distinctive part of large informal sector around the world. It is commonly viewed in the public spaces, particularly in the cities/towns and distinctive in the sense that it provides many basic goods and services to the urban inhabitants (Muzaffar, et al., 2009).

The Section 2 (1) (L) of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act 2014 defined the “street vendor as a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary build up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous term which may be local or region specific, and the words „street vending” with their grammatical variations and cognate expressions, shall be construed accordingly” (GOI, 2014).

In another paper “Street Vendors in Asia: A Review”, Bhowmik (2005) attempted to examine recent research done on street vendors in Asia with the aim of assessing the magnitude of street vending in different countries and the composition of the vendors and found the growing number of street vendors in the cities of Asia due to the shrinking of jobs in the formal sector and with lack of gainful employment in rural areas. The rural unemployed tend to move to the cities in search of employment with low skills and low levels of education. Both factors make it almost impossible for them to find regular jobs in the formal sector. Street vending is one of the few options they have for earning a living. Entry into this trade is easier because it does not require high skills and the capital involved is low. This is seen in the case of Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam and

Cambodia. In the other countries, especially the „Asian Tigers”-Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines and South Korea, there was a rapid increase in the number of street vendors after the monetary crisis of 1998. In India, the number of street vendors increased after the economic liberalization policy was initiated in 1991. The traditional industrial cities, such as Mumbai, Ahmadabad and Kolkata saw a decline in the formal sector as many large factories closed down and started outsourcing to the small-scale industries. A section of the workers in the formal sector, or their wives, took to street vending after they lost their jobs. Unfortunately, the governments in these countries have more or less refused to recognize street vending as a legal activity and they, in fact, view these vendors as irritants to the city's development.

In their research based on the field survey, Suraiya and Noor (2012) examined the socio-economic conditions of street vendors and the contribution of street vending activity in the context of income, employment and provision of goods and services in Dhaka city. The study found that lack of formalization and weak management system, had created many problems in the urban areas by producing garbage and gathering crowd on the footpaths. These were some of the unfavorable effects of street trade, which were also identified by the study. While making concluding observations, the authors underlined the need of proper public management system, training programmer for vendors, credit facility and updating national policies to tackle the socio-economic problems associated with street vendors.

The number of street vendors is far more than just 50 lakhs in this country, where, about 2-2.5% of the urban population is involved in such jobs (Bhowmik 2005). Keeping this in mind, the benefits provided by the government under this scheme is highly insufficient. There is an urgency to provide financial support to street vendors not only for sustaining during this pandemic but also to bounce back to their normal livelihood activities (SEWA 2020).

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The unit of analysis of the study are the street vendors in Varanasi. Participants consisted of 60 street vendors. A qualitative approach was used to collect the data through schedule based on the objective of the study and closed-ended questions were used to collect the data. The schedule contained multiple questions about few basic personal questions and the main objective is to know about the impact of covid, awareness of any government schemes, and their expectations from the government.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Street vendors have been severely impacted by lockdown because their line of employment necessitates a great deal of mobility and access to markets, clients and merchandise. Most of the vendors in the sample are belongs to Varanasi who are dependent on daily wages they earn from street vending.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	44	73.3
Female	16	26.7
Total	60	100

Table 1: Gender

SOURCE: Primary Data



Fig. 1: Gender

Figure1 shows that out of 60 street vendors, male street vendors are 44 and rest are female. The percentage of male street vendors are 73.33% and that of female street vendors are 26.7%. This tells us that the contribution of male street vendors are more than female street vendors in vending. Some reasons behind it that homework frequently interfered with the business time of female vendors, they had to take care of their children because no one could take care of them at home. During pandemic, female vendors had to stay at home to take care of children and family members.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 25	6	10
25-35 years	21	35
35-50 years	24	40
Above 50 years	9	15
Total	60	100

Table 2: Age

SOURCE: Primary Data

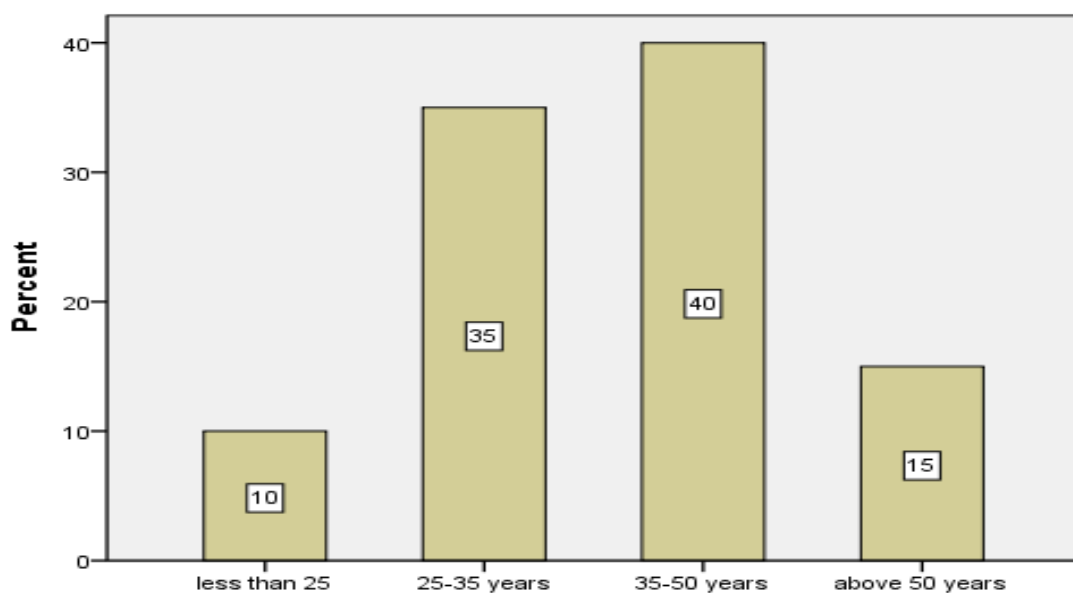


Fig. 2: Age

Figure 2 shows that out of 60 street vendors, 10% street vendors are in the age group of less than 25 years, 35% street vendors are in the age group of 25-35 years, 40% street vendors are in the age group of 35-50 years and 15% street vendors are in the age group of above 50 years. It shows that the majority of them (75%) are in the age of 25-50 years which is lesser vulnerable to Covid-19.

Level of income	Frequency	Percentage
100-500	41	68.3
500-1000	18	30
Above 1000	1	1.7
Total	60	100

Table 3: Level of Income

SOURCE: Primary Data

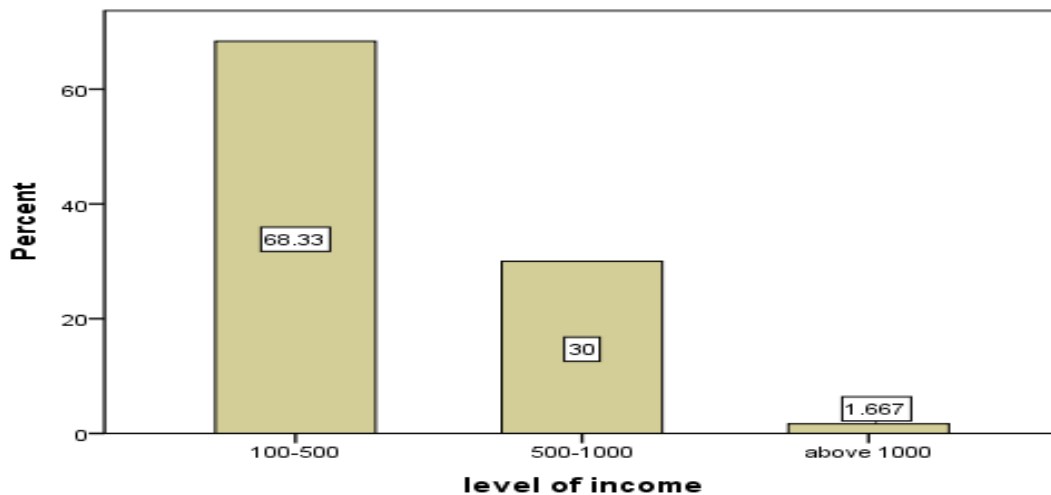


Fig. 3: Level of Income

Figure 3 shows that out of 60 street vendors, 68.3% street vendors are in the income group of 100-500 rupees per day, 30% street vendors are in the income group of 500-1000 and rest i.e., 1.7% street vendor is in the income group of above 1000. It also tells us that majority of them earn up to 500 rupees per day that is not sufficient for survival. During lockdown they were not able to earn livelihoods that creates a big problem for them as they had not any means for earning and survival.

Education	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	19	31.7
High school	20	33.3
Intermediate	14	23.3
Graduate	7	11.7
Total	60	100

Table 4: Education

SOURCE: Primary Data

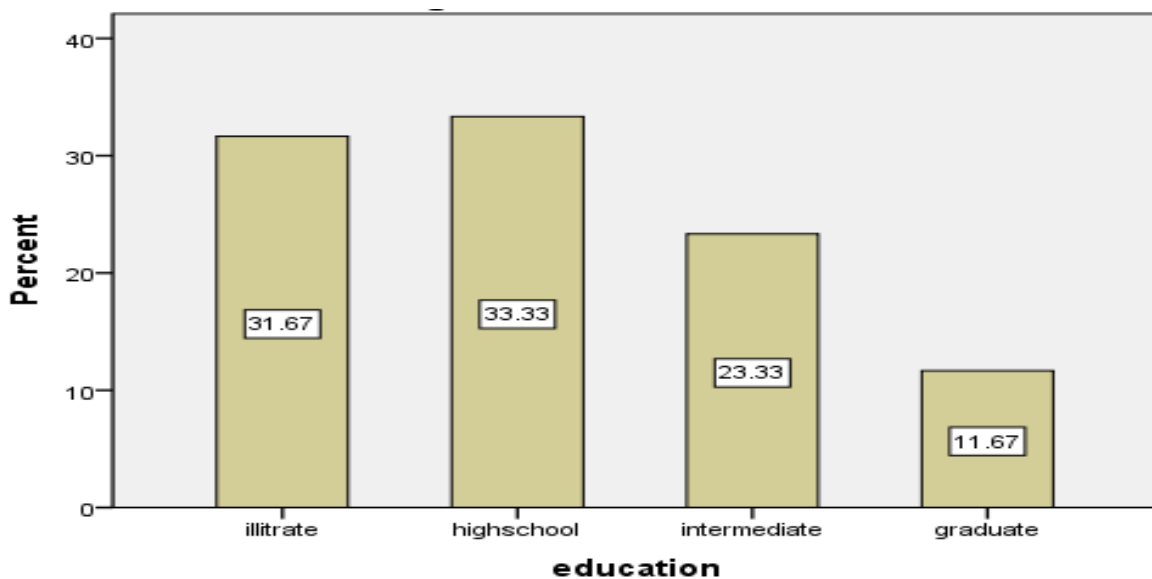


Fig. 4: Education

Figure 4 shows that out of 60 street vendors, 31.7% street vendors are illiterate, 33.3% street vendors are higher school passed, 23.3% street vendors are higher secondary school passed out and 11.7% street vendors are graduate. This tells us that most of the street vendors are educated and they are giving their contribution in increasing the literacy rate of the country. Approx 70% street vendors are educated hence they understood why the govt imposed regulation on mobility and selling of goods during pandemic. They were providing their support through selling of goods in restricted time period and using mask and sanitizer while selling of goods.

Impact of covid on income	Frequency	Percent
Positive	3	5
Negative	56	93.3
No effect	1	1.7
Total	60	100

Table 5: Impact of Covid-19 on Income of Street Vendors

SOURCE: Primary Data

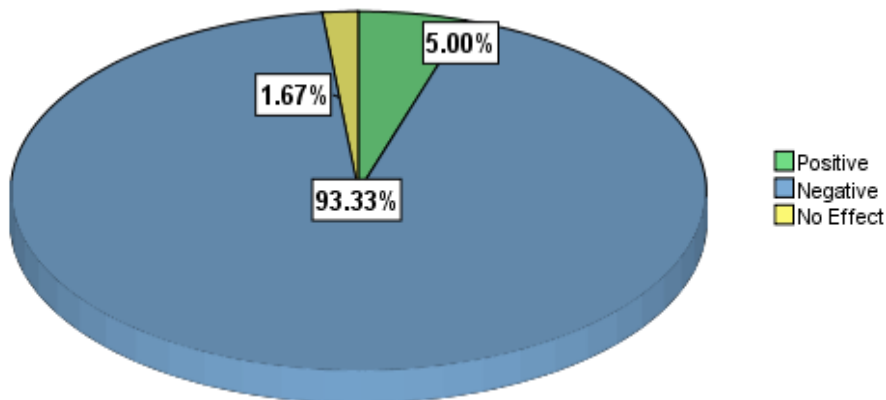


Fig. 5: Impact of Covid-19 on Income of Street Vendors

Figure 5 shows that 93.3% of street vendors have a negative impact on their income and 5% of street vendors have a positive impact and 1.7% have no impact on their income. Some street vendors said that due to pandemic and lockdown, they were not able to earn, due to which they did not have any source of income. At that time this was the biggest problem for them to earn livelihood. 40 out of 60 vendors referred to the alteration of the household environment significantly. They had to cut their household spending in half or less. 56 out of 60 vendors said that they had stopped making money during the lockdown. This left them with no money to purchase provisions for their homes. They had to suffer severe mental stress during pandemic. One of street vendors said “It is lockdown but homes are not

closed. Income has been shut down but expenses continue.” Most of the street vendors were not able to pay EMI as they had no source of income during pandemic.

Impact on family	Frequency	Percent
Affected from corona virus	17	28.3
Death from corona virus	4	6.7
No effect	39	65
Total	60	100

Table 6: The Impact of Covid-19 on family of street vendors

SOURCE: Primary Data

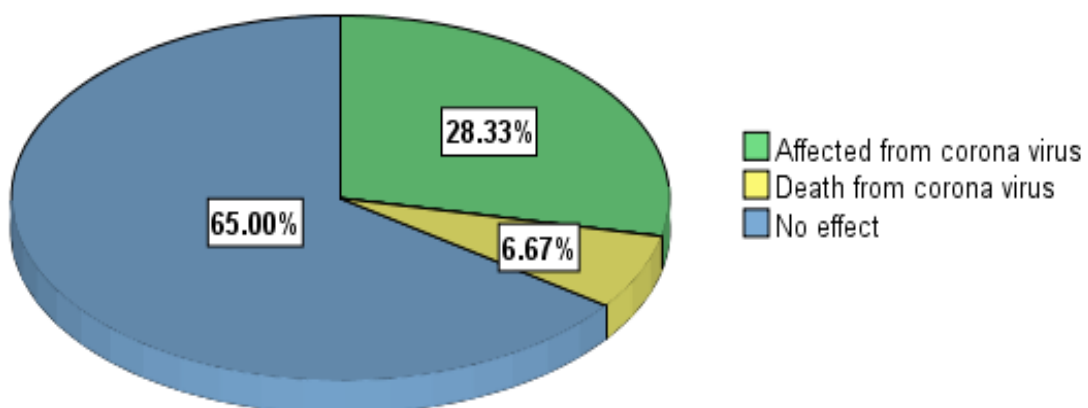


Fig. 6: The Impact of Covid-19 on family of street vendors

Figure6 shows that majority (65%) of the street vendors and their family has not affected from Covid-19, 28.3% street vendors and their family members has been infected from Covid-19 and admitted to hospital and 6.67% street vendors faced extreme loss like death in their family. Many of them are unable to bear the cost of treatment of their family members. The level of stress had been increased during pandemic. A street vendor said that he could not give treatment to his brother due to no source of income during pandemic, who was suffered from lung disease.

Depend on saving during pandemic	Frequency	Percent
Yes	54	90
No	6	10
Total	60	100

Table 7: Depend on saving during Covid-19

SOURCE: Primary Data

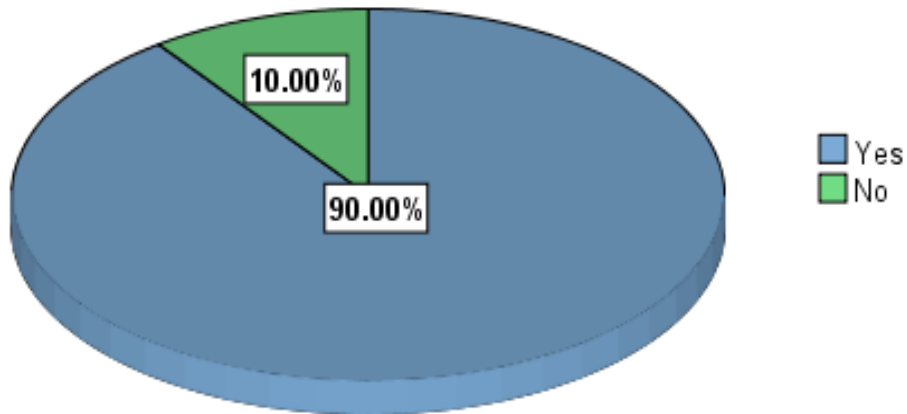


Fig. 7: Depend on saving during Covid-19

Figure7 shows that majority of street vendors (90%) depends on their saving during pandemic and rest of them (10%) was surviving by selling some essentials commodities in restricted time period.

Promotion of livelihoods for all traders, especially those who deal in non-essential goods: The effects of COVID-19 have been particularly difficult on informal laborer, who have spent all of their savings and income attempting to survive during the prolonged lockdown.

Debt	Frequency	Percent
Increased	46	76.7
Decreased	3	5
No effect	11	18.3
Total	60	100

Table 8: Impact on debt during Covid-19

SOURCE: Primary Data

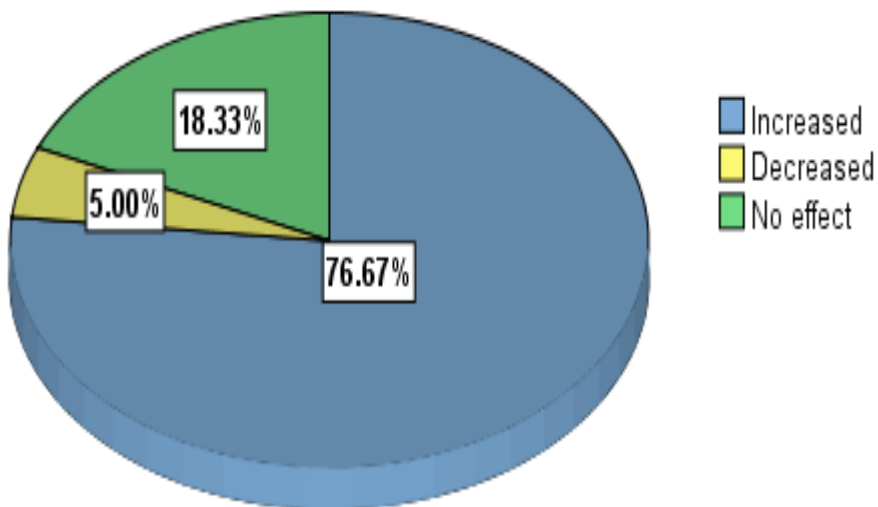


Fig. 8: Impact on debt during Covid-19

Figure 8 shows that 76.67% of street vendors had debt crisis during covid time, 5% of street vendors' debt decreased during covid time and 18.33% of street vendors had no effect on debt during covid time. One reason behind debt crisis during pandemic was that they were not able to earn money and had to take debt to survive. About half of the participants had to take out a loan during the lockdown to pay for their daily expenditures. Their businesses have been shut down for months due to the ongoing lockdown, leaving them with little choice except to return the loan.

Switched work	Frequency	Percent
Yes	27	45
No	33	55
Total	60	100

Table 9: Switched work due to Covid-19

SOURCE: Primary Data

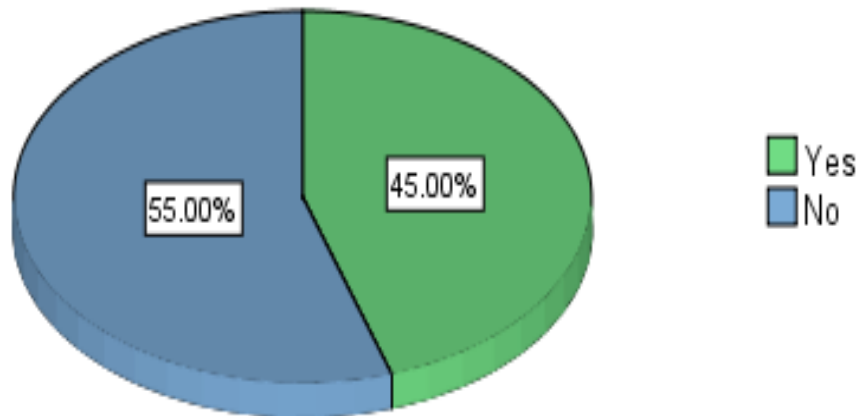


Fig. 9: Switched work due to Covid-19

Figure 9 shows that during the lockdown, the majority of the food merchants were powerless to do anything. Due to their financial struggles caused by the lack of income, they had to think about beginning new businesses. Due to financial struggle, 45% of street vendors who sold food items, plastic goods etc. had to switch their work. Few food vendors (10/60) began selling simply vegetables and fruits because it was simple to do so at that time. Others began their food vending businesses through home and parcel delivery services.

Assistance from Govt	Frequency	Percent
Yes	42	70
No	18	30
Total	60	100

Table 10: Assistance from Govt during Covid-19

SOURCE: Primary Data

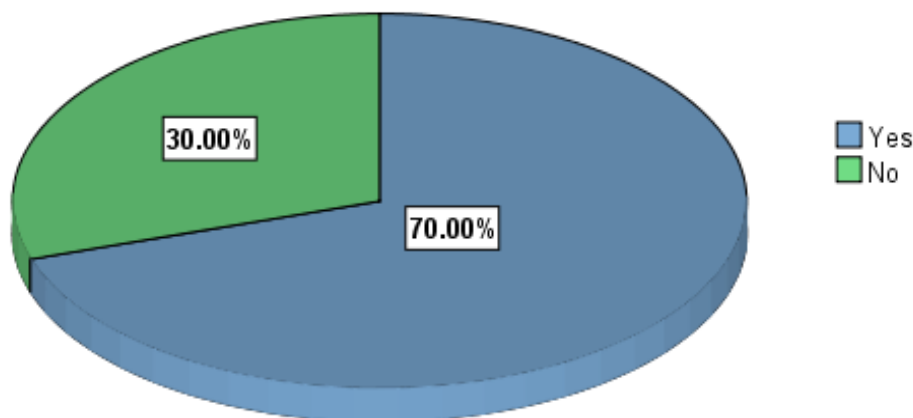


Fig. 10: Assistance from Govt during Covid-19

Figure 10 shows that majority (70%) of street vendors received assistance from Government like free rations from Public Distribution System (PDS) shops or political leaders and amount of Rs 1000 per month in their account. Rest 30% of street vendors did not receive any assistance from govt. A reason behind not getting assistance that they have no account in bank and some street vendors are migrated due to this they were not able to get free rations. The majority of participants were unaware of the central government's announced programmes. Some (15\60) claimed that there was no assurance that government programmes would help them because of flaws that existed at several levels. The relief fund of Rs. 20 lakh crores to combat COVID-19 was announced during the time the data was collected, but no real and obvious efforts have been made to help street sellers. The knowledgeable sellers

(10\60) were aware that this scheme allows for loans up to 10,000 rupees, but no additional information has been released.

Financial assistance to restart work after pandemic	Frequency	Percent
Yes	35	58.3
No	25	41.7
Total	60	100

Table 11: Financial Assistance to restart work after pandemic

SOURCE: Primary Data

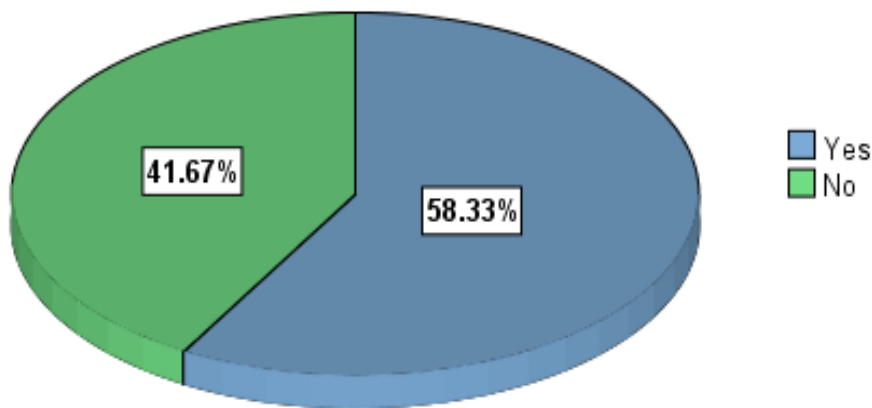


Fig. 11: Financial Assistance to restart work after pandemic

Figure 11 shows that 58.3% of street vendors had to take financial assistance from banks, relatives, friends etc. to restart their work after pandemic and rest 41.67% of street vendors had no need to take financial assistance to restart their work. Majority of them had to take financial assistance because they had not enough saved to restart their work.

Sources of Financial assistance	Frequency	Percent
Friends/relatives	25	41.7
Bank loan	9	15
SHG	1	1.7
NA	25	41.7
Total	60	100

Table 12: Sources of Financial Assistance to restart work

SOURCE: Primary Data

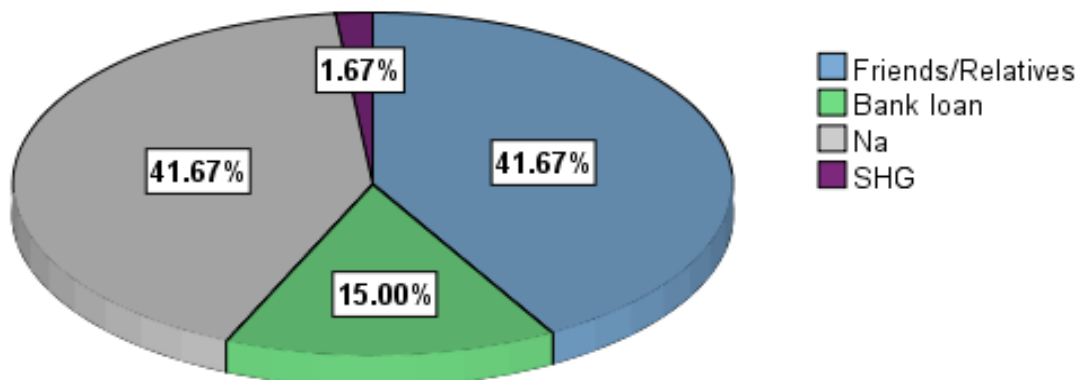


Fig. 12: Sources of Financial Assistance to restart work

Figure12 shows that 41.67% street vendors took loan from friends/relative, 15% street vendors took loan from bank directly, 1.67% street vendors took loan from “Self Help group” and rest 41.67% street vendors had no requirement to take loan to restart their work. The percentage of street vendors who took loan from bank is not enough because some of them have no account and some of them who have account have not any security on which basis, they got loan from bank that’s why they have to take loan from friends\relatives to restart their work again after pandemic.

Expectation from Govt	Frequency	Percent
Yes	40	66.7
No	20	33.3
Total	60	100

Table 13: Expectation from Govt after Covid-19

SOURCE: Primary Data

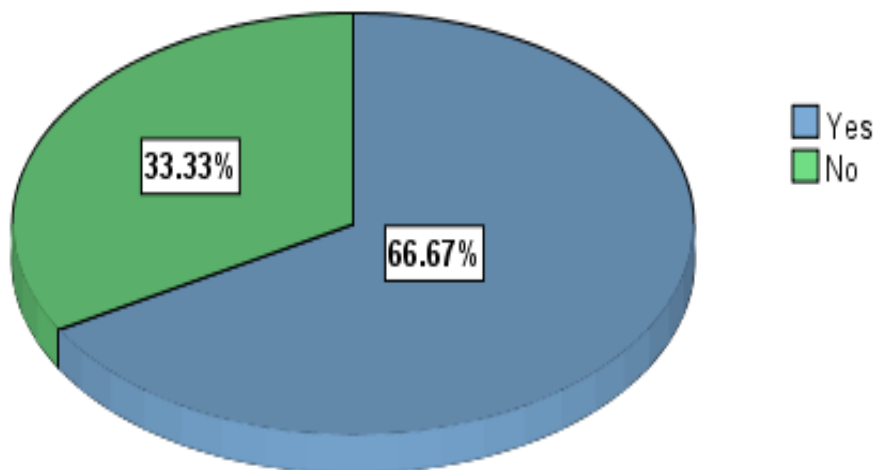


Fig. 13: Expectation from Govt after Covid-19

Figure13 shows that 66.67% of street vendors have expectation from gov't to get any type of assistance i.e., monetary or non-monetary after pandemic to cope up with losses which was occurred with Covid-19 and rest 33.33% of street vendors have no expectation from gov't. Vendors who have secured loans anticipate that either the government will aid them with their loans or would forgive their debts, or that specific politicians will step up and offer them financial support. However, some vendors claimed that simply giving them rations is insufficient and that the government should instead provide them with financial aid to help them with the costs of living that must be incurred on a daily basis.

VI. CONCLUSION

The largest lockdown ever enacted in India's history has had a disastrous effect on daily wage workers' life in terms of lost livelihoods, a lack of food, and housing. The employment activities have experienced the biggest impact. Many of these workers were left stranded on the streets because some of them are migrants. They can only hope that the promised solution relieves these workers equitably from their protracted suffering and grief, notwithstanding the government's efforts to develop employment initiatives for individuals who lost their jobs during the statewide lockdown.

The majority of street sellers were unaware of and did not understand the programmes that are the government's introduction of a system for street vendors, which can be used to maximise profits. Since they had no income during the lockdown and later, the street sellers most desperately required financial assistance. Despite this, many managed to survive by using their lifelong savings or borrowing money at extremely high interest rates from private money lenders.

Government officials and policymakers must also develop evidence-based, comprehensive plans after holding appropriate consultations with representatives of India's street sellers. Along with this, the "street vendors (protection of livelihood and regulation of street vending) act" must be properly implemented by requiring the local authorities to include a fair representation of street vendors in TVCs (Town Vending Commission). These TVCs should represent street vendors' interests not just in dire circumstances, but also during their routine struggles with evictions, licensing, legality, and other pressing problems.

If the authorities carry out such a carefully thought-out and targeted programme, it will not only provide immediate relief from their current sufferings but also ensure their future security and restore their lost confidence and self-respect, which are vital and fundamental rights of every human being, regardless of status or eminence.

Loans should be given at a low rate of interest to street vendors so that repaying will be easy for them. Banks should also give options of daily repayment by automatic deductions of loans. Banks should also give monetary loans to street vendors for children's education.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BETTERMENT OF STREET VENDORS:

- Procedure for applying in any govt scheme for street vendors should be easy and understandable because most of them are not educated.
- Govt must be focus on advertisement of their schemes for street vendors because schemes come and they don't even know about it.
- For any pandemic, street vending license fees should be abolished.
- Provide social security to vendors so that poor vendors, who cannot afford proper treatment for their health issues, can benefit from health insurance.
- Adequate financial support should be provided to the vendors by the authorities to overcome the adverse impact of the pandemic.
- Town Vending Committee (TVCs) should address the problems of street vendors which they faced during pandemic and trying to come up with a new scheme which actually helps them.

REFERENCES

- [1.] Meher, S., Ranjan, A., Tamgire, L., & Shukla, P. (2020). 'It is lockdown but homes are not closed. Income has been shut down but expenses continue:' Impact of lockdown due to COVID-19 on the livelihood of Street Vendors in Maharashtra.
- [2.] Shegunshi, M. P., & Hiremath, G. N. (2020). Covid-19 Impact on Indian Labour Class.
- [3.] Times, N. (2020). Nepal covid-19 lockdown extended till 7 April. URL: <https://www.Nepal.times.com/latest/nepal-covid-19-lockdown-extended-till-7-april>.
- [4.] Nirathron, N. (2006). Fighting poverty from the street. A Survey of Street Food Vendors in Bangkok.
- [5.] International Labour Organization. Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A statistical Picture Second Edition, 2013. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/publication/wcms_234413.pdf. Accessed 30 June 2020
- [6.] SEWA. SEWA: Impact of Coronavirus on the informal economy, 2020. Available at: <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/SEWA-Delhi-Covid-19-Impact.pdf>. Accessed 30 June 2020
- [7.] Bhowmik, S. K. (2005). Street vendors in Asia: A review. *Economic and political weekly*, 2256-2264.
- [8.] Saha, D. (2011). Working life of street vendors in Mumbai. *The Indian journal of labour economics*, 54(2), 301-325.
- [9.] Arsene, M. B., Lebon, H. M., Maurice, K. N., Benjamin, M. B., Faustin, B. M., & Jean-Hélène, K. K. (2020). Understanding the roles of street vendors of agricultural commodities during the COVID-19 outbreak in the informal economy. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(9), 115-129.
- [10.] Taylor M, Chandran R, Reuters Foundation T. Asia's street food hawkers struggle during coronavirus lockdowns. Reuters, 2020. Available at: <https://in.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-asia/asias-street-food-hawkers-struggle-during-coronavirus-lockdowns-idUSL4N2BH2ZA>. Accessed 10 June 2020
- [11.] Nirathron, N. (2006). Fighting poverty from the street. A Survey of Street Food Vendors in Bangkok.
- [12.] Government of India. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. 2021. Available at <https://covid19.nhp.gov.in>. Accessed 08 July 2021.
- [13.] Government of India. (2020a). COVID-19 INDIA. May 10, 2020. <https://www.mohfw.gov.in/>. Accessed 10 June 2020.
- [14.] Government of India. The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. Gazette of India, GOI. Available at: [http://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/StreetVendorAct2014_English_\(1\).pdf](http://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/StreetVendorAct2014_English_(1).pdf). Accessed 11 June 2020.
- [15.] The Economic Times. Lockdown 4.0 guidelines: Nationwide lockdown extended till May 31, with considerable relaxations. The Economic Times, 2020. Available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/centreextends-nationwide-lockdown-till-may-31-withconsiderable-relaxations/articleshow/75790821.cms>. Accessed 8 June 2020
- [16.] Nicola, M., Alsafi, Z., Sohrabi, C., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C., ... & Agha, R. (2020). The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): A review. *International journal of surgery*, 78, 185-193.
- [17.] McKibbin, W., & Fernando, R. (2021). The global macroeconomic impacts of COVID-19: Seven scenarios. *Asian Economic Papers*, 20(2), 1-30.
- [18.] Recchi, S. (2020). Informal street vending: a comparative literature review. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*.
- [19.] Dokku, S. R., Jampala, R. C., & Lakshmi, P. A. (2022). A Study on the Impact of COVID-19 on Street Vendors in India: With Reference to Vijayawada City, Andhra Pradesh, India. In *Multidisciplinary Perspectives Towards Building a Digitally Competent Society* (pp. 174-188). IGI Global.