



**Research Article**

**ADVERSITIES IN STREET VENDORS' LIVELIHOOD AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

Present study aims at analyzing the adversities in street vendors' livelihoods and coping strategies adopted for their livelihood security. The study is based on first-hand data collected through a field survey during February 2013 covering 179 fruit vendors from 11 selected locations. The study revealed that the vulnerabilities faced by the street vendors are varied in nature associated with occupational security, urban amenities and others. Out of total respondents, 75.4 percent have reported problems associated to security of their vending goods and cash. More than 22 percent have been suffered from health problems due to unhealthy working environment including lack of urban amenities. Besides, they have been threatened by local shopkeepers and inhabitants. They have adopted varieties of measures to cope with these adverse situations to secure their occupational rights and survival base. The coping strategies adopted by street vendors include devotion of longer time, involvement of family members on other occupations, unethical measures to secure from police and rowdy persons and sharing accommodation to reduce economic burden.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Many cities in the developing world in recent years have brought with it a new challenge- widespread and increasing urban poverty (Ray & Mishra, 2011). The poverty has become more pressing, including the issues of how the urban poor earn their livelihoods (Maxwell et al., 2000). Urban dwellers especially of poor, whether or not they are migrants, survive through undertaking a variety of activities in the informal sector for their livelihoods. The informal sector encompasses largely unrecognized, unrecorded and unregulated varieties of small enterprises (ILO, 2004; Timsina, 2011). Urban poor, due to their poor economic condition attracted to this sector as this is one of the easy options for livelihoods and can run it with a small amount or very limited investment. At the same time, lack of jobs in the formal sector of the economy as well as the lack of skills in a large part of the labour force especially of poor ones has attracted in this sector (ILO, 2004).

It is an important occupation for the urban poor (Kusakabe, 2006), especially in each developing cities of South Asia (Saief Uddin Ahmed, nd).

As in many cities of neighboring countries like in India (Ray, & Mishra, 2011; Panwar & Garg, 2015), Bangladesh (Saief Uddin Ahmed, nd; Husain, Yasmin & Islam, 2015) and Thailand (Kusakabe, 2006)), street vending is an increasing

urban phenomenon in the Kathmandu city (Timalsina, 2007). There were about 30,000 street vendors in Kathmandu valley and more than 20,000 in Kathmandu metropolitan city (Adhikari, 2011). Street vending is a self-employed work as street vendors' sale goods and services to the public without having a permanent promise to conduct business (Cited in Husain, Yasmin & Islam, 2015). They provide easy access to a wide range of goods and services in the public spaces of cities around the world (Rover, 2014). They move from place to place carrying their wares on push carts or in cycles or baskets on their heads and the like. Local city dwellers are also benefited from them as they reach at the consumers' convenient locations, without which people would have to travel large distances to procure such goods. In addition, it contributes in strengthening local economy by providing industrial products to the markets as well. The street vending is considered as a feasible livelihood options due to its small start up cost, flexible working hours and low barrier to entry and low requirements for education, skills and technology (ILO, 2013).

There is high risk of working in informal sector that depend upon access to public space. Number of studies highlighted the risks associated to this sector (ODI, 2008; Makhetha, 2010; Turner & Schoenberger, 2012; Panwar & Garg, 2015; Rover & Skinner, 2016). Hackenbroch (2013) claimed that there is a risk of being dislocated from a specific place and thus uncertainty about whether the current livelihood strategy can be maintained or not. For example, China has striven to exclude street vendors through political campaigns such as

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“National Sanitary City” and “National Civilized City” (Shuru Zhong, 2017). Likewise, Vietnam’s central government and Hanoi’s municipal authorities have been negotiating a ban in street vending in many preferred locales to maintain security orderliness and development to create a modern, civilized capital (Turner and Schoenberger, 2012). Panwar & Garg (2015) also state that often, vending is on an illegal basis contrary to the government regulations. The observation of Rover and Skinner (2016) exploring the situation of street vending in five cities of different continents is not different; there is high risks in livelihoods of street vendors. Since street vending activities have been increasing in the cities of Nepal, no doubt, livelihoods of people who depend on street vending are at risks. However, little is known about the ways in which poor street fruit vendors are living and how they secure their livelihoods in Kathmandu which is characterized by highly competitive and unreliable job markets, widespread insecurity and abundant health risks. The present study is an attempt along this line to explore risks or adversities in street fruit vendors' livelihoods and coping strategies adopted for their livelihood security.

## STUDY AREA AND METHODS

### Study Area

The study is confined to the street vendor's livelihood in Kathmandu that includes Kathmandu and Lalitpur Metropolitan City areas. Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, is located in the central Hills between geographic coordinates 27° 39' 47" to 27° 45' latitudes and 85° 16' 45" to 85° 22' 20" east longitudes. This is the heart of the Kathmandu valley situated almost in the central position (Figure 1) that covers an area of 64.6 square kilometers. The land use of Kathmandu is dominated by urban built-up area that covers 51.5 percent area followed by cultivated land (40.8 percent), natural vegetation (7.0 percent) and water body and open space (0.7 percent) (Rimal, 2010).

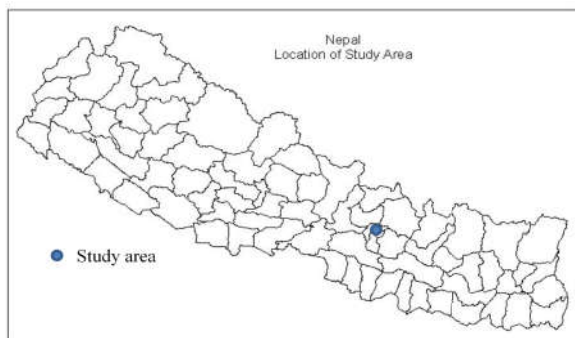


Figure 1: Location of Study Area

This area is relatively developed in terms of physical and social infrastructure as compared to rest of the parts of the country; however, it has been facing many social and environmental problems. As of population census 2011, this area provides home for 1,229,986 people with 309,512 households. Population density was 19,040 persons per square kilometer (CBS, 2012). There is heavy influx of population in Kathmandu from different parts of Nepal, as many formal institutions related to education, banking and finance, health, trade, tourism and others are concentrated in the city.

### Study Method

The study adopted livelihood model of DFID (1999) in analyzing livelihoods of street vendor focusing on vulnerability contexts and coping strategies. This study is based primarily on first-hand data collected through a field survey during February 2013. A total of 11 locations (Figure 2) having 20 or more street vendors were selected using systematic random sampling technique from a list of 110 street vending locations identified by CIUD (2008) having 20 and more street vendors.

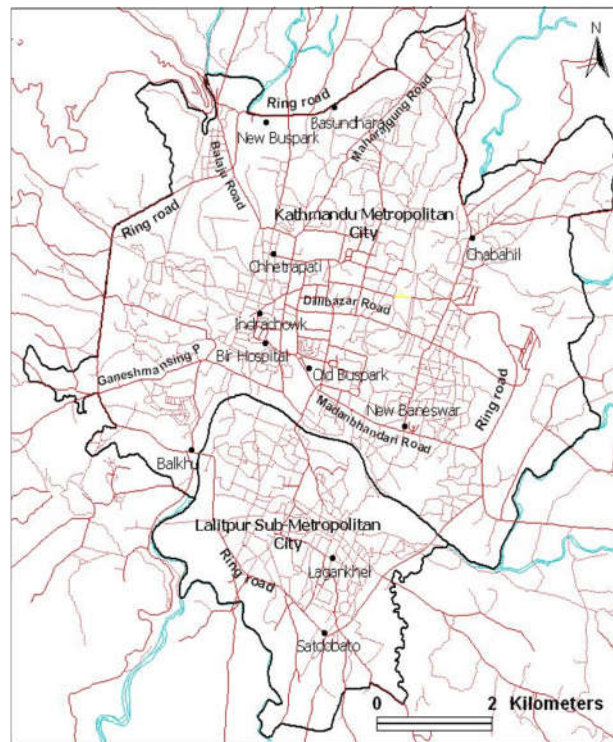


Figure 2: Location of Sample Sites

All the street fruit vendors of the selected locations were interviewed. Besides, key informant's interview and observation techniques were also applied for data collection. Relevant secondary data/ information were also acquired from published and unpublished sources. Verification of information was made by triangulating information from surveys, key informants' interview and field observation. The study applied mixed design, using both statistical and non-statistical tools. Simple statistical tools like percentage and frequencies are used along with statistical diagrams for data analysis.

### Features of Street fruit Vending in Kathmandu

The street vending activities has been growing in the Kathmandu city with heavy influx of people from outside Kathmandu. Widespread poverty, insecurity, and lack of opportunities in the rural areas are the major push factors to migrate people from rural areas to the Kathmandu city. Job opportunities in the formal sectors are limited and unskilled and less educated people do not get jobs in the formal sectors, and they attracted in the informal sectors to eke out their livelihood needs. People especially of poor ones, can easily inter in this sector as it needs limited starting cost and having no specific skills and education.

Kathmandu is one of the hubs of street vendors as vending activities have been increasing in recent years. Among different street vending activities, fruit vending is one of the common activities. Street fruit vendors offer varieties of seasonal fruits available in the market depending on season. A large number of people, both migrant and native of Kathmandu were involved in street fruit vending activities. Some prominent features of street fruit vending activities in Kathmandu are summarized in Table 1 based on the responses of 179 street vendors those covered in this survey.

The main features of street fruit vendors of Kathmandu city area include reasons for starting this particular business in this area, migration status, time spent for business, the static or mobile nature of business and involvement of family members in the business. Regarding reasons for selecting street fruit vending activity, 76 percent out of total 179 respondents reported that they chose street fruit vending activity as it needs low investments. Some people (7.3 percent) started this business due to failure of previous business/occupation that they were involved before starting this. Nearly 5 percent of the street vendors reported that they have chosen this activity as they thought it as a convenient job and 5.5 percent reported other reasons.

**Table 1** Features of street fruit vending in Kathmandu

Description	Number of respondent	Percent
<b>1. Reasons for starting this business</b>		
Needs low investment	136	76.0
Failure of previous job	13	7.3
Can run in own decision	12	6.7
Other reasons	18	10.0
<b>2. Migration status</b>		
Migrants	172	96.0
Native of Kathmandu	7	4.0
<b>3. Daily time spent for vending</b>		
Less than 8 hours	4	2.2
8 to 12 hours	94	52.5
More than 12 hours	81	45.3
<b>4. Place of vending fruits</b>		
Fixed place	125	69.8
No fixed place	54	30.2
<b>5. Involvement of family members</b>		
No other family members involved	25	8.4
Involved same occupation	90	50.3
Involved in other occupation	74	41.3

Source: Field survey, 2013

Both native and migrants were involved in this activity. Of them, overwhelming majority (96 percent) were migrants and only 4 percent (7 persons) were natives of Kathmandu. Out of total migrants, almost 58 percent were from different districts of Nepal. The proportion was high from adjoining districts like Nuwakot, Dhading and Dolakha districts. Remaining 42 percent were migrated across the international border from different parts of India. The most common reason reported by the migrants was for searching good opportunities for better income and job. The proportion of people reporting this reason was 84.4 percent. Nearly 37 percent of the respondents reported poverty as the main cause for migration and starting this business.

Regarding vending place, 70 percent reported fixed place for vending and 30 percent reported their mobile nature. Regarding time of starting fruit vending activity, 55 percent of the respondents reported that they started this occupation in between 5-10 years before the time of survey, 16 percent from 15 years and 15 percent from more than 15 years. Regarding

involvement of other family members, 50 percent of the respondents reported that some of their family members were also involved in the same business. The family members of 41 percent of the respondents were involved in other occupations.

**Adverse Situations in Vendor's Livelihood**

Livelihood of street fruit vendor is hard and insecure owing to varieties of adversities. The adverse situations faced by the vendors of Kathmandu are varied in nature. These are associated to security of their occupations, related to urban amenities, actions of Municipal Corporation, and others. The main adversities associated with street fruit vending activities in Kathmandu City area are summarized in Table 2. Since respondents reported more than one response, the frequency of responses exceeds total number of respondents and similar is the case of percentage.

**Table 2** Threats in street vendor's livelihoods at workplace

Vulnerability context	Frequency	Percent
Security threat	135	75.4
Access to amenities and health risk	119	66.5
Sales fluctuation or seasonality	115	63.7
Seizing of goods by Metro Police	50	27.9
Other problems	7	3.9

Source: Field survey, 2013

Table 2 shows the adversities in street fruit vendor's livelihoods as reported by the respondents of the study area. A brief account of these adversities is discussed in the subsections below.

**Security threat**

The main constraint faced by the vendors was associated to security of their goods and cash. Out of total 179 respondents, 75.4 percent reported that they have been facing problems associated to security of their vending goods. Looting of goods and cash by rowdy persons/drunks and stealing of goods were the common problems faced by the street vendors. Regarding security situation, an Indian born Mithu Kumar Saha, 31, who has been vending seasonal fruits at Lagankhel since last 10 years said that “we are not secure. Last year, one day, all the cash I had was looted by the druggist at Lagankhel at about 7 o'clock in the evening. I was alone and helpless. I could not do anything. I tried to report to the police but they escaped”. Street vendors also claimed that their wares were also occasionally stolen. During heavy pedestrian flow street children steal their goods. Threats by local inhabitants and shop owners were also evident. They scolded fruit vendors using bad words and forced to leave the place of vending and getting space at another place is not that easy.

**Access to amenities and health risk**

Since the fruit vendors work at street they had been facing problems of toilet and drinking water as many locations lack these facilities. In such areas, either they urinate at open space or they have to control themselves for long. One of the respondents claimed that due to lack of toilet facility he does not drink water for a long time even in the hot summer days. Regarding access to amenities especially of toilet, Buddhi Man Tamang, 41, who was involved in street fruit vending at Chabahil since many years claimed that “there is no public toilet in this area, we have been facing problem for toilet even for urination. In this area there are some policemen of our area and I solve my problem with the help of them otherwise it is very difficult”. For drinking water they have to manage

themselves and majority of mobile vendors keep a bottle of water with them. Usually, most of mobile vendors drink untreated water.

Majority of the vendors did not have permanent shops/shades and perform their business at open places. Working places were not suitable and unhealthy due to dust and smoke. More than one-fifth of the respondents claimed that they have been facing some health problems due to dust and smoke. Problem of intense heat during summer and chilling cold during winter make their lives more vulnerable at street. Another problem they have been facing was rain water. Occasionally they suffered from hailstorm. After day-long work when they go to their home they feel uneasy and mostly suffered headache and backache. Common problems they faced as reported were cough problem, and eye irritation. Unmanaged eating time is another component related to health risks. Street vendors, especially mobile ones, eat early in the morning and involved in their activities throughout the day mostly without taking snacks except some fruits which they have. They did not have time to eat since there were no alternatives to look after their loads during daytime in the street.

**Sales Fluctuation or Seasonality**

Seasonality is not always negative for the street fruit vendors; it may have positive impacts too. The amount of sale thereby income from fruit sale varies by season. Sales volume of fruit depends on a range of different factors. These include weather conditions, festivals, ritual ceremonies and other market related factors. Rich and well-off people consume fruits throughout the year. However, poor people generally buy fruits for some occasions. Sales volume becomes high during festival times as compared to other seasons. Social and cultural ceremonies are the main occasions during which sales of fruit increases. Generally, sales volume remains fairly high during summer as compared to the winter season except in rainy days. Table 3 shows the general pattern of sales of fruit items in the Kathmandu City by season.

**Table 3** Seasonality of sales of fruit items

Season	Impact on fruit business	Impact on earning
Winter season	Decline in sales volume as many people do not like fruits in the winter. Sale increases only during social ceremonies and festivals.	Moderate earning
Summer season	Moderate sales as compared to winter, as weather becomes hot many people buy seasonal fruits.	Moderate earning
During festival	Sales volume increases with movement of people	High earning
During strikes and holidays	Decline in sales volume, problem of getting fruits from wholesale market, constraints in movement etc.	Low earning

*Source: Field survey, 2013*

The other factors influencing sales of fruits include other market related factors as well. During strikes, sales not only become low, it is difficult to get fruits from wholesale market too. Due to frequent strikes in Kathmandu, people involved in vending activities became sufferer and occasionally they got loss rather than profit, due to perishable nature of goods.

**Seizing of goods by Metro Police**

Since street vending in core city areas is restricted, Municipal Corporation time and again captures goods of street vendors using Metropolitan Police. Vendors escape from the place at the arrival of Police, and return again as Police move away. Though Municipal authorities are aware about the result of their repeated and futile actions for controlling street vending activities, they continue this action since they have not been able to implement better alternatives for maintaining street. Nearly 28 percent (Table 2) of the respondents reported their

experience that Metro Police captured their goods without any warning and returns to them after payment of fine fixed by the Municipal Corporation. Sometimes Metro Police seizes all the goods captured. Many vendors claimed that they lost goods during and after the eviction, and sometimes Metro Police asked them for bribe. Vendors have to wait few hours to days to get their evicted belongings back from Metro Police due to official formality and other reasons. In some cases, they lost all the goods as fruit items do not remain fresh for a long. This makes vendors' livelihood more vulnerable. Regarding direct or indirect impact of Police action, one of the respondents Ram Bhagat Miya, 55, who has been vending seasonal fruits at Ratnapark area since last 15 years, states that "when Metro Police comes situation becomes terrible, all the vendors rush to escape from Police. Last year I was at Ratnapark area, I heard of voice chanting Police! Police! I was just watching the situation, someone pushed me and all the fruits of my basket fell down and scattered. I tried to collect them but some were destroyed by crowd and some were collected by others. At that time, I lost about 25 percent of fruits from my basket".

**Other threats**

Conflict for getting vending space is also an issue that vendors are increasingly facing at present. Besides, most of the vendors expressed that they have been threatened by local shopkeepers and inhabitants blaming street vending activity as an agent of environmental pollution. They also charge vendors for causing traffic congestion by occupying public places and footpath, making it difficult for vehicular and pedestrian movement. Vendors are also charged as noise makers. The other aspects of vulnerability include risks of accidents. Street vendors have been working with high risks of accidents since congested and narrow streets in Kathmandu are more liable to accidents.

**The Coping Strategies**

Livelihood of street fruit vendors in Kathmandu is hard and risky owing to varieties of adversities discussed above. They have adopted varieties of measures to cope with adverse situations they have been facing to secure their occupational rights and survival base. The coping strategies adopted by them include longer involvement on the same job, involvement of family members on other gainful jobs, donation to local clubs, police and rowdy persons to secure their place of vending, sharing of accommodation with friends to reduce economic burden and others.

**Involvement of family members in other jobs**

One of the coping strategies adopted by the street fruit vendors to secure their livelihoods was involvement of family members in other gainful jobs. With the support from other family members, street vendors maintained their household problems. Majority of vendors (52 percent) reported that some of their household members were involved in different gainful activities to eke out their livelihoods (Figure 3). The proportion of population involved in other business activities was 31.3 percent followed by agriculture (19.8 percent), service (3.7 percent), wage labor (1.1 percent), and other occupations (1.5 percent). Almost 43 percent of the surveyed vendors reported none of their family members were involved in other gainful jobs.

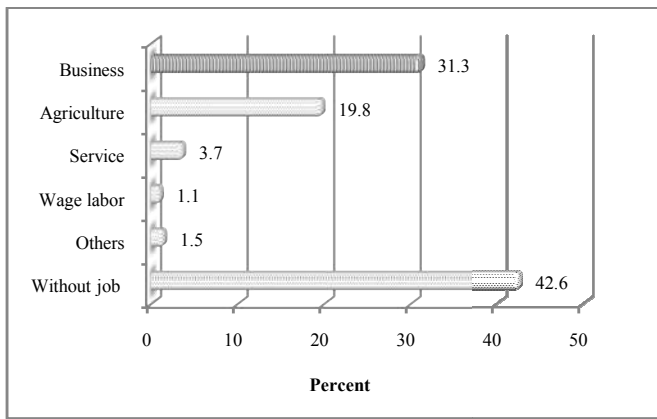


Figure 3 Job of Street vendor's family members

They were fully dependent on fruit vending. Of the total dependent, 22.9 percent were students and remaining 19.7 percent were old age people.

**Accommodation sharing**

Sharing accommodation was one of the options adopted by the vendors to cope with the adverse situation to maintain their family with their limited income since a large proportion of income goes to house rent in Kathmandu. More than 41 percent of the vendors managed their accommodation sharing with friends and relatives. The proportion of vendors living alone was only 4 percent (Table 4).

Table 4 Vendors' living arrangement

Living arrangement	Number	Percent
Alone	7	3.9
Family members	98	54.7
Friends/ Relatives	74	41.4
Total	179	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2013

More than 41 percent of the street fruit vendors reported that they have been living sharing residence with friends and relatives. The main purpose of sharing residence was to reduce accommodation cost. Of the total vendors sharing residence, the proportion of vendors living 8 or more than 8 persons in a common residence was 15 percent. Since majority of the street fruit vendors are poor, they live in low cost rental rooms at ground floor and share common kitchen and bathrooms. In many cases such rooms at city core areas are poorly ventilated and less exposed to the sun and unhealthy.

**Ethical and unethical payments**

Paying ethical and unethical money is another measure adopted by the vendors to run their vending business at street. One-third of the respondents paid some money to run their business. Street vendors are of two types- static and mobile. Static vendors often run their business either in permanent shutter or temporary shades. For this, they have to pay fixed rent either to Municipal Corporation or house/stall owner as per their negotiation. While for mobile ones they do not have to pay by rule. However, majority of the mobile street vendors reported that they have been paying a sum of unethical money either in the name of local club, police or for local street men otherwise; they would not be able to operate their vending business smoothly. The amount of money they would pay ranged from rupees 10 to 500. They had to pay to drunkards too. In such cases, the amount of money they would pay depended on the nature of drunkard and presence or absence of

vendor members. In addition, they also had to pay NRs 10 per day to street garbage collectors.

**Longer time devotion**

Another coping measure adopted by the vendors was longer time devotion. They claimed that they earn more money if they spent more time for vending at street. Time spent by the street fruit vendors in terms of working hour is presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Time spent for vending

Working hours	Number	Percent
Less than 8 hours	4	2.2
8-12 hours	94	52.5
More than 12 hours	81	45.3
Total	179	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2013

More than 45 percent of the respondents claimed that they spent more than 12 hours in the street and 52.5 percent spent 8-12 hours a day. Vendors spent more time at places nearby hospitals, colleges and the like.

**CONCLUSION**

Street fruit vending is an important source of employment in the Kathmandu city and also provides cheap goods and services to the urban dwellers. It is one of the survival strategies especially of the urban poor in response to insufficient job opportunities in the formal sectors. Street fruit vendors in Kathmandu City have been working in an adverse situation with lots of threats from different sources. Both ethical and unethical measures were adopted as coping measures to avoid such threats to secure their occupational right and survival base. Despite several efforts made from the Municipal Corporation, street vending activities have been increasing in Kathmandu. This is the result of increasing unemployment both in rural and urban areas, wide gap between urban and rural areas in terms of availability of facilities, loose government policy, and poor security situation in rural areas.

Worse environmental condition of the workplace has made most of the vendors suffer with ill health condition. At the same time, they have been facing problem of social discrimination at their living as well as workplace. They were also exploited from locals and security personnel. They were not organized well and hence are weak in defending their occupational rights. Since street vending is an informal activity, its sustainability is based on the Municipal Policy, availability of other opportunities to the vendors and their own judgment.

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