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Examining the Influence of Marital Status and Educational Attainment on the income of street vendors in Ima Keithel,Manipur

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Abstract

Women's participation in informal economic activity act as a main source of livelihood and household support in places where access to secure and formal employment remains limited. In a state like Manipur, Ima Keithel is known for its distinctive women-centred marketplace where many women earn their income through trading. This paper examines whether the proportion of household income contributed through vending varies according to the marital status and educational attainment of women vendors at Ima Keithel. The result of the analysis are drawn from primary data of 483 women vendors and uses descriptive statistics, 95 per cent confidence intervals, an independent-samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The overall mean contribution of vending to household income is 50.05 per cent. Vendors classified as widowed/unmarried report a higher mean contribution (70.36 per cent) than married vendors (49.45 per cent), a difference of 20.91 percentage points. The original analysis reports a statistically significant difference ($t = 2.575$, $p = 0.010$). Educational categories also differ significantly overall ($F = 3.462$, $p = 0.008$): matriculate vendors report the highest mean contribution (54.95 per cent), followed by illiterate vendors (53.32 per cent), while the 10+2 group reports the lowest (42.13 per cent). The pattern does not indicate a simple linear relationship between education and the relative contribution of vending. The findings underline the importance of Ima Keithel as a livelihood institution and show that women's relative contribution to household income varies across the various socioeconomic groups. The paper concludes that policy interventions should recognise women vendors' economic contribution while improving access to social protection, infrastructure, finance and relevant skills.

Keywords: Informal, economy, income contribution, marital-status, livelihood.

1. Introduction

The informal economy provides employment and livelihood opportunities to a substantial proportion of workers in developing economies. For people who face barriers to formal employment, self-employment and small-scale trading can provide a means of earning income, maintaining household consumption and responding to changing economic circumstances. These activities are often characterised by modest capital requirements, uncertain returns and limited access to social protection. Yet they remain integral to urban economies and to the everyday functioning of local markets.

Women's participation in informal work warrants particular attention because economic activity is frequently combined with domestic responsibilities and unpaid care work. The income generated by women may contribute to food, education, healthcare, housing and other household expenses. However,

women's economic contribution is not always adequately recognised, especially when work takes place in small-scale or informal settings. Understanding women's work therefore requires attention not only to their participation in the labour market but also to the share of household resources that their work helps to provide.

Ima Keithel, located in Imphal, Manipur, offers an important setting in which to examine these issues. Commonly known as the Mothers' Market, it is distinguished by the prominent role of women in trading and commercial activity. The market is not only a site of buying and selling; it is also an institution through which women sustain livelihoods, maintain trading relationships and participate in the urban economy. Its historical and cultural significance is well recognised, but the economic circumstances of individual vendors cannot be ignored.

The contribution street vendor makes to household income may vary according to women's family circumstances and educational backgrounds. Marital status may be associated with the organisation of household income, the presence of other earners and the distribution of financial responsibilities. Education may shape access to alternative employment and the ability to use formal financial or institutional resources. At the same time, informal trading relies on practical knowledge, experience, customer relationships and access to working capital; consequently, educational attainment may not correspond directly to the proportion of household income contributed through vending.

This paper examines the relationship between marital status, educational attainment and the relative contribution of vending to household income among 483 women vendors at Ima Keithel. It focuses on the proportion of household income attributed to vending, rather than on absolute earnings or profit. The distinction is important: a high percentage contribution may reflect substantial vending income, relatively low income from other household members, or both. The analysis therefore treats the measure as an indicator of the relative importance of vending within the household income mix.

The paper makes a focused empirical contribution by examining how this relative contribution varies across two socioeconomic characteristics in a major women-centred marketplace. It does not seek to establish causal effects or to represent all women vendors in Manipur. Instead, it uses the available survey data to identify patterns that can inform further research and discussion of gender, informal employment and household livelihood security.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Informal economy and women's livelihoods

Hart's (1973) study of informal income opportunities in urban Ghana helped establish the informal sector as an important field of inquiry. It challenged the view that economic activities outside formal wage employment were merely marginal or temporary. Subsequent scholarship has emphasised the diversity of informal work and the close connections between formal and informal economic arrangements. Chen (2012), for example, argues that the informal economy should be understood as a heterogeneous system that includes self-employment, small enterprises, informal wage work and other forms of livelihood activity.

The gender dimension of informal employment is central to understanding women's livelihood strategies. Informal work may offer flexibility and an accessible route to earning income, but this flexibility often exists alongside insecure earnings, weak social protection and limited institutional support. Women's participation is also shaped by the gendered distribution of domestic and care responsibilities. The International Labour Organization (2018) documents the continuing scale and significance of informal

employment and highlights the need to improve working conditions and social protection for informal workers.

2.2 Street vending and urban informal employment

Street vending is a visible and significant form of informal economic activity in many Asian cities. Vendors provide accessible goods and services, support local distribution networks and create self-employment opportunities for people who may have limited access to formal jobs. Bhowmik (2005) examines street vending in Asian countries and draws attention to the contribution of vendors as well as the difficulties they face, including insecure workspaces, inadequate infrastructure and regulatory uncertainty. Bhowmik's edited volume (2010) further situates street vending within the global urban economy and argues for recognising its livelihood and economic significance.

In India, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, provides a legislative framework concerned with the protection of livelihood and the regulation of street vending. The existence of a legal framework, however, does not by itself resolve the practical challenges faced by vendors. Access to secure vending spaces, sanitation, storage, finance and social security remains important to the sustainability of informal livelihoods.

2.3 Research gap and contribution

The literature establishes the importance of informal employment and street vending, including the gendered conditions under which women earn livelihoods. However, there remains a need for empirical studies that examine how the relative contribution of vending to household income varies across the socioeconomic characteristics of women working in specific marketplaces. In the case of Ima Keithel, accounts of the market's cultural and historical significance can be complemented by quantitative analysis of vendors' household economic contribution.

This study addresses that focused gap by analysing the reported percentage contribution of vending to household income among 483 women vendors, comparing the results by marital-status and educational categories. Its contribution lies in documenting variation within the study sample and identifying questions for more detailed research on household structure, income sources and the organisation of women's informal work.

3. Objectives of the study

- To analyse the differences in the relative contribution of vending according to vendors' marital-status category.
- To examine differences in the relative contribution of vending across educational categories.
- To analyse the statistical significance of the observed group differences.

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4. Research methodology

4.1 Study area

The study was conducted at Ima Keithel in Imphal, the capital city of Manipur. The market is widely recognised for the central role played by women in its trading activities. Vendors engage in the sale of different commodities and participate in small-scale commercial activities that contribute to household livelihoods. Its concentration of women traders makes Ima Keithel a market hub and therefore a relevant setting for examining the relationship between women's informal economic activity and household income.

4.2 Data and respondents

The analysis is based on primary data relating to 483 women vendors at Ima Keithel. The variables available for this paper are respondents' marital-status category, educational attainment and the percentage contribution of vending to total household income. The marital-status variable is grouped into married (n = 469) and widowed/unmarried (n = 14). Educational attainment is classified into five categories: illiterate, under-matriculate, matriculate, 10+2 standard, and graduate and above. The data was collected during November 2023-February 2024 using structured questionnaire method and it uses stratified random sampling method.

4.3 Measurement of variables

The dependent variable is the percentage contribution of street vending to total household income. It is interpreted as the share of household income attributed to vending, as recorded in the original survey. It is not a measure of vendors' gross sales, net profit, personal income or absolute household income. The independent variables are marital-status category and educational attainment.For the calculation of total household income income of the other earning members were also included.

5. Analysis

5.1 Overall contribution of vending to household income

Across the 483 respondents, the reported mean contribution of vending to total household income is 50.05 per cent (SD = 30.12; 95 per cent CI: 47.36–52.74). On average, therefore, vending accounts for approximately half of the household income represented in the survey measure. The sizeable standard deviation indicates substantial variation between respondents. The overall mean should not be interpreted as meaning that every vendor contributes half of household income, nor does it indicate the absolute amount earned.

5.2 Marital-status category and household income contribution

Marital-status category	N	Mean contribution (%)	SD	95% CI
Married	469	49.45	29.77	46.74–52.15
Widowed/unmarried	14	70.36	35.60	49.80–90.91
Total	483	50.05	30.12	47.36–52.74

Calculated from primary sources

Reported independent-samples t-test: t = 2.575, p = 0.010 (equal-variances result in the supplied analysis).

The mean contribution among vendors in the widowed/unmarried category is 70.36 per cent, compared with 49.45 per cent among married vendors. The difference is 20.91 percentage points. This indicates that vending represents a larger share of household income, on average, among the 14 respondents in the combined widowed/unmarried category than among married respondents.

The reported equal-variances t-test indicates a statistically significant difference at the 5 per cent level. However, the small size of the widowed/unmarried group and the substantial imbalance between the two groups require cautious interpretation. Its confidence interval is wide (49.80–90.91), indicating less precise estimation of the group mean. The approximate Welch sensitivity calculation based on rounded summary statistics also suggests a difference, but with a result close to the 5 per cent threshold (|t|

approximately 2.18, df approximately 13.55, p approximately 0.048). The exact Welch result must be obtained from the respondent-level data.

The result is evidence of a difference in the relative contribution measure, not proof that widowhood or unmarried status causes a higher contribution. The combined category also prevents separate conclusions about widowed and unmarried vendors. Household composition, the presence and earnings of other household members, dependants and other sources of income may influence the percentage attributed to vending.

5.3 Educational attainment and household income contribution

Educational category	N	Mean contribution (%)	SD	95% CI
Illiterate	167	53.32	30.84	48.61–58.03
Under-matriculate	58	47.41	31.67	39.08–55.73
Matriculate	107	54.95	27.25	49.73–60.17
10+2 standard	120	42.13	30.23	36.67–47.60
Graduate and above	31	51.14	27.38	41.10–61.19
Total	483	50.05	30.12	47.36–52.74

Calculated from primary sources

Reported one-way ANOVA: $F = 3.462$, $p = 0.008$.

The mean contribution differs across the five educational categories. Matriculate vendors report the highest mean (54.95 per cent), followed by illiterate vendors (53.32 per cent) and graduates and above (51.14 per cent). The under-matriculate group reports a mean of 47.41 per cent, while the 10+2 group records the lowest mean at 42.13 per cent.

The reported ANOVA result indicates that the five-group means are not all equal at the 5 per cent level. The result is consistent with an association between educational category and the relative contribution of vending to household income. It does not, by itself, establish that every educational group differs from every other group. Pairwise post-hoc comparisons are required to identify the specific differences.

The pattern is not linear: the highest mean is observed among matriculate vendors rather than the most highly educated group, while illiterate vendors also report a comparatively high mean. This finding cautions against assuming that greater formal education necessarily corresponds to a larger share of household income being generated through vending or it may be due to other social skills.It does not show that education reduces income or economic well-being. The measure captures vending's share of household income, which can also be affected by other household income sources.

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that women's contribution to household income through vending at Ima Keithel varies according to marital status and educational attainment. Widowed and unmarried vendors report a higher average contribution (70.36%) than married vendors (49.45%), suggesting that vending may represent a more significant source of household income for some women in the former category. However, this difference should be interpreted cautiously because the combined widowed/unmarried group consists of only 14 respondents. Educational attainment also reveals a non-linear pattern, with

matriculate (54.95%) and illiterate vendors (53.32%) recording higher average contributions, while the 10+2 group reports the lowest (42.13%). This suggests that formal education alone does not determine women's economic contribution, as practical trading experience, business networks and household income arrangements may also play important roles. Overall, the findings highlight Ima Keithel as an important institution of household livelihood support and women's economic participation. They also emphasise the need for gender-sensitive policies that recognise differences in vendors' socioeconomic circumstances and strengthen market infrastructure, livelihood security and access to social protection.

7. Policy implications

The findings highlight the need for policies that recognise women vendors' contribution to household income and strengthen their economic security. Accessible social protection, including health benefits, maternity support and old-age provisions, should be extended to informal workers. Improving market infrastructure through adequate sanitation, drinking water, storage, lighting and safe vending spaces is equally important. In addition, affordable institutional credit and practical training in bookkeeping, digital payments and business management can strengthen vendors' livelihoods. Policy interventions should also consider differences in household circumstances and socioeconomic conditions without making assumptions based on marital status or educational attainment.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that women's vending at Ima Keithel is not merely an occupational activity but an important source of household livelihood and economic security. Contributing an average of 50.05 per cent of household income, vending plays a substantial role in sustaining the economic well-being of the households represented in the study. The variations observed across marital status and educational groups further highlight the diverse economic circumstances of women vendors and the importance of understanding their contributions within wider household and socioeconomic contexts. Although the findings establish associations rather than causal relationships, they underscore the significance of Ima Keithel as a vital market place for women's economic participation, livelihood generation and financial contribution to their families. Recognising this contribution through inclusive policies, improved market infrastructure, better working conditions and accessible social protection is essential not only for safeguarding women vendors' livelihoods but also for strengthening the broader socioeconomic significance of this historic marketplace.

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