

Spatial and temporal variation of women labour in fish vending in Kerala

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Fish vendors are small-scale sellers of fish and also potential actors in the fish supply chain. They played a significant role in increasing fish consumption in both coastal and landlocked regions. Fish vending is the primary traditional occupation and the only economic means of livelihood for many households. Fish vendors are one of the market functionaries in the fish supply chain who are the viable linkage between producers and final consumers. Fish vendors differ from other market functionaries in terms of convenient time and ease of purchase, all along the way the consumers. They are considered critical from the labourers' point of view, as their work is still considered invisible which really possess a hindrance to bringing uniform policies for fish vendors.

Fish vendors contributed two ways in increasing fish consumption and economic support to the households. There is no proper account of the number of fish vendors in the country for proper management. The majority of fish vendors were women and old aged (above 50 years). Their quality of life is low, highly independent but trapped by the issues of money lenders and are deprived of occupational dignity with decent work. Women fish vendors

are relatively sub-standard levels of socio-economic status and they suffer various kinds of neglect and deprivation in terms of work conditions, financial support, transportation facilities and storage facilities. Even though, fish vending is one of the traditional occupations, it is still out of the purview of labour policy, labour laws and regulations.

With this background, a pilot study was conducted with a main focus on labour availability in fish vending in various districts of Kerala, India. The study is based on secondary and primary field-level data. The secondary data across the five years (2014 - 2018) was collected from the publications of the Department of Fisheries, Government of Kerala. Field-level data were used to assess the perception of women fish vendors on their employment in Ernakulam District, Kerala.

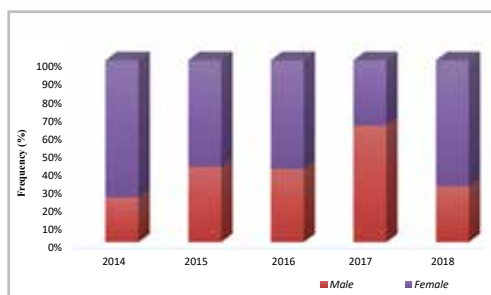
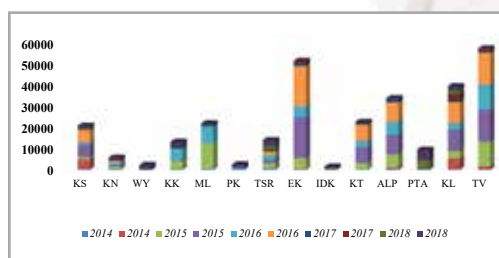


Fig. 1 Gender-wise fish vendors in Kerala

The gender-wise fish vendors in Kerala showed that the majority were women (67%) with ages ranging above 60 are maximum. Fish selling is the major source of livelihood for the fish vendors who are the linking force between the production and consumption activities. Their workforce is unskilled and less protective under labour rights and laws.

The temporal data revealed that there is a 78.12% reduction in the number of fish vendors when comparing 2014 to 2018. The number of fish vendors in Kerala was maximum in 2014 and minimum in 2018. The ratio of men and women vendors was maximum (1:3) and minimum (1:0.55) during 2014 to 2017 respectively. This clearly explained the existence of a gender paradox in the fish vending occupation in Kerala. It can be concluded that fish vending is purely a women-dominated occupation.



* KS - Kasargod; KN - Kannur; WY - Wayanad;
KK - Kozhikode, ML - Malappuram;
PL - Palakkad; TSR - Trissur; EK - Ernakulam;
IDK - Idukki; KT - Kottayam; ALP - Alappuzha;
PA - Pathanamthitta; KL - Kollam;
TV - Thiruvananthapuram.

Fig. 2. District-wise distribution of fish vendors in Kerala

The spatial data showed that the fish vendors were more concentrated in the coastal districts viz., Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam followed by Kozhikode and Alappuzha. And, the minimum number of fish vendors was represented by land-locked districts viz., Pathanamthitta, Palakkad, Wayanad and Idukki.

Table 1. Perception of fish vendors on their occupation difficulties

Particulars	SA	SD
Productive employment	34	56
Flexible working time	51	32
Balancing work and family	42	36
Income stability	37	52
Safe work environment	23	65
Social security	26	61
Collective bargaining	21	63

* SA-Strongly Agree; A- Agree; N - Neutral; D-disagree; SD-Strongly Disagree

From the results, it was revealed that in Ernakulam, the majority of the women fish vendors expressed that they were not satisfied with a safe work environment (65%), collective bargaining (63%) and social security (61%) which are considered as pillars of decent employment. Their nature of employment is not so productive and encouraging (56%) and more than

50% of the respondents felt instability in their income. They were agreed on the statements on flexible work time (51%) and able to balance work and family (42%). In general, the vendors are deprived of proper market infrastructure, storage facilities and public transport facilities that are vital for their fish vending activity. A comprehensive framework for the women fish vendors is necessary towards their economic and

social upliftment through effective policy initiatives.

Reference

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