

Socio-Economic Problems and Future Prospects of Women Fish Vendors in Kanniyakumari District

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Abstract

Women fish vendors play a vital role in the fisheries sector of Kanniyakumari District by contributing significantly to household income and local fish distribution. However, they face several socio-economic challenges, including inadequate access to credit, lack of storage and transportation facilities, market competition, price fluctuations, and health-related issues. This study examines the socio-economic problems encountered by women fish vendors and explores the opportunities available for their economic and social advancement. The findings emphasize the need for improved infrastructure, financial support, skill development, and welfare measures to enhance their livelihood security and promote sustainable development and empowerment.

Key words: Women fish vendor, Fish Marketing, Economic Empowerment, Financial Inclusion, Social Welfare.

Introduction

Fish is the primary source of protein for over one billion people in the world. Fishing is also the main source of income for over 100 million people who are directly involved in fishing. (Mukharjee 2005) A large portion of the population is employed in fisheries as well as in industries closely related to fishery-related activities. The fisheries sector plays a vital role in the socioeconomic development of the country. Apart from generating marine fish food produce, it stimulates the growth of many subsidiary industries for processing and production of various value-added fish products, and this sector has been recognised as a powerful employment and income generator. The fishery sector of India contributes to 1.07 per cent of the GDP and 4.7 per cent of the agricultural GDP, and contributes about ₹7,200 crores annually by way of export earnings. Fish is one of the major sources of protein globally, and also for a substantial section of Indian population (Kalita and Bhagabati 2007)

Women play a crucial role in fisheries. Women are currently working in all phases of fish production, processing and distribution across the world and contribute to the generation of wealth, the preservation of aquatic ecosystems, and the maintenance of families and communities in rural and coastal regions. They make up half of the workforce and play a vital role in fisheries and aquaculture economies. (FAO 2017) However, their hard work and dedication were never recognised by official statistics, sector policies and development programs. The FAO collects statistics on the primary fish production sector, in which women make up only 14 percent of workers, as estimated from returns by a limited number of member countries. FAO does not collect data on the secondary sector, which employs many more women, and statistics on small-scale fisheries where women are more numerous than in industrial fishing, are relatively poor. Global and most national fisheries policies are gender-blind. The 2014 Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF) in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication was the first major fisheries instrument to incorporate gender equality. (Nilanjana Biswas 2017) The most relevant Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), number 14, which focuses on Life below Water, is one of the few SDGs not to contain gender targets for the Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

Women, who have always played an important role in the fishing industry, are now in a position to play a meaningful role in fisheries management and administration too, with the increasing number of women getting an education or training in this field. The fishing industry in India has seen much progress in recent years, and this development now calls for professionally trained manpower for both technical and administrative purposes. Women have traditionally participated in most post-harvest operations, including marketing, apart from other activities such as net fabrication and repair. In the process, they have developed a keen feeling for the industry and ingenious ways of managing the fish caught, so as to maximise their earnings. As in most families living at subsistence levels, the woman plays an extremely important role in fishing families, too, as a homemaker. It is her thrift and ingenuity that often keep the family together,

as the menfolk are generally wasteful. Therefore, everything possible must be done to better the lot of these women. (Sudhindra Gadagkar 2021)

Problems Faced by Women Fish Vendors

Women fish vendors deal with different assortments of confusion that fishermen themselves face less often. Fish vendors, on the other hand, with their produce have to carry it and travel from water bodies to markets, unlike men who devote all their labour either in the sea or the river. Fish and public law are different for them. This, in turn, exposes them to one form of prejudice or another and various problems. The following are some of the major challenges they are tackling:

Financial problems

Female fish vendors are generally from poor families and rarely possess ready capital to buy fish every day. The only option left very often is to borrow. Friends, relatives and private money lenders are the usual sources of credit, with varying rates of interest. Although there are several special schemes with low interest rates for economically weaker sections, these women are unable to obtain loans from banks as they have no assets of their own to use as collateral. Private money lenders charge very high rates of interest. If ₹.100 is to be borrowed, only ₹ 90 is given in the morning and ₹ 101 has to be returned in the evening. Such high interest rates cut on the meagre income they earn, thereby forcing them to cut back on the requirements of the family. (Sudhindra Gadagkar 1990)

Marketing problems

Several old women carry on the trade in small quantities merely to ensure their independence. Some vendors form informal groups, pool resources and carry on their trade. The price paid for the fish depends upon the variety and the place of procurement, among other things. Marketing costs involve commission or fees to middlemen, market taxes, cost of ice, transportation charges, food, interest on loans, etc. Transportation and food alone account for 60 to 80 percent of the marketing costs. Market tax collection is a highly lucrative and exploitative business. The authorities usually auction the job of market tax collection to private contractors, who often demand two or three times the stipulated tax from the vendors. Women refusing to pay these unjust 'taxes' have been beaten up and their fish destroyed. (Srinath and Thangamani 1992)

Social Problems

Fisherwomen play either the role of a housewife or as a source of income through fishing jobs. The main social problems identified by them were dowry, lack of proper health care, low literacy among children, and lack of cooperation among different fishermen and fisherwomen. Besides, women who are involved in fish selling face many problems like fluctuating market prices, unhygienic marketplaces, lack of basic amenities in the marketplace. Perhaps an effective way of solving social problems is to get the fisherwomen to form a voluntary organisation through which they would be able to redress their grievances. (Mathew 2003).

Economic problems

Most of the respondents rated poor income as the major economic problem. Lack of any alternate employment also leads to many complications. They are forced to borrow money, and it becomes difficult to pay back the money; the vicious circle of indebtedness continues. The fisher women also indicated low prices for products and a lack of assured markets as the main constraints. They sell their products to local households and in markets because of a lack of a proper marketing channel.

Health problems

The fisherwomen carry loads of fish from the lakes/water bodies to the nearest markets every day. The women carry the fish on their heads, and with the load of 35-40 kgs, the pressure comes on their bodies, especially their backs. The fisher women are prone to diarrhoea and fever. Women are the worst affected, and this is reflected by the imbalance in the sex ratio.

Education-related problems

Literacy is considered as an indicator of development. However, the literacy level of the fisherwomen as well as their children is very low. Low literacy incapacitates their bargaining capacity in the market, thus divesting them of their reasonable price.

Other problems

The female fish vendor, despite her vital role in the fishing industry, not only faces various kinds of problems at each stage in her profession, but also has to hold on to the means of livelihood under constant threat of competition from sophisticated sales outlets such as refrigerated booths. Invariably, she undertakes the job of fish marketing in

addition to household responsibilities of cooking, raising children, and attending to the needs of an often abusive and wasteful husband.

At the same time, she also has to care for any unsold fish that she has had to carry back home, finding the time and energy to clean and salt the fish, and to dry them the next day. To add to her problems, her financial responsibilities at home are many. For example, the repayment of debts incurred for weddings and other family functions, as well as for contingencies such as illness, is her sole responsibility. To carry out these responsibilities, she has to be consistently efficient and successful at the procurement of fish and its marketing. These facts add up to make the life of the female fish vendor extremely stressful and with concomitant health problems such as back pain, headache and poor eyesight.

Need For the Study

Women fish vendors sell fish from door to door of the households in the interior areas. Their living and working conditions have been full of difficulties and challenges beyond their own ability to address. Their service and contributions are valuable to society. Hence, there is a need for study for the survival of the women fish vendors. The purpose of this research is to study the problems and prospects of women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari District. The study on problems of women fish vendors in this district will be of enormous use to the government to find out the basic needs and problems of women fish vendors. An understanding and analysis of socio-economic conditions, marketing performance and challenges of fish vending women is expected to answer these concerns. That is the relevance of the study.

Statement of Problem

India is one of the countries where a major part of the area is covered under sea. As a result, the major population of these regions is fully engaged in fish farming and fish catching. In India men are involved in fish capture and women are mainly involved in fish marketing. They sell variety of fishes through various means. The socio-economic conditions of the women fish vendors play a significant role in their standard of living. Women fish vendors are in vulnerable standard of living due to low income and low asset base, indebtedness, too small business, lack of time for children, alcoholism of their husbands, too much spending for household affairs, lack of saving for future, lack of entrepreneurial skills, lack of sufficient capital, lack of sufficient transportation facilities, lack of sufficient types and number of vessels, very low level of engagements with society and little participation in local body governance processes. Women fish vendors are under stress and strain for a long term of time. They are not able to scale up their business and improve their lives. Working conditions are bad. Income is low. They are not able to address the problems and come up in life. The reasons behind this very few schemes are available targeted to women fish vendors alone. The researcher is challenged by the problem whether the changes that have happened in the Kanniyakumari district and in their societies have made any significant impact on the life, work and working conditions of one of the presently conspicuous social groups, that is, fish vending women. The study also seeks to find whether fish vending women in Kanniyakumari District have come up at par with other occupational categories within their communities, in the case of standard of living, as indicated by their possession of land, house and other basic amenities such as home appliances. If changes have really happened in their life and work in proportion to the changes outside, it is then necessary to ascertain the extent of change. It is again important to investigate if these changes were digressive or progressive in terms of socio-economics. Hence, research is required to weed out the exploitation of the weaker section with total illiteracy living along the coastal line. It will throw light on their real contribution to economic development. This will also pave the way for proper compensation for their activities through suitable policy measures. The present research aims to study the women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari district in Tamil Nadu.

Scope of Study

The study would provide information about the problems and prospects of women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari district. The sphere of this research is also extended to the analysis of socio-economic conditions of women fish vendors. This research also attempt to build models for socio-economic empowerment, marketing performance, and challenges faced by women fish vendors. Finally, the study would also try to offer constructive suggestions for evolving a firm and a suitable policy for women fish vendors.

Objectives of the Study

- i) To analyse the level of satisfaction of women fish vendors in the fish vending business.
- ii) To find out the problems faced by the women fish vendors in terms of fishing activities

Research Methodology

A research design is a plan according to which observations are made, and data are assembled. The research work confines itself to an in-depth analysis of “Problems and prospects of Women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari District” The study is based on primary data, in particular, and secondary data in general. Primary data are collected through an interview schedule from women fish vendors. Secondary data are collected by referring to books, journals, magazines, research papers, articles and websites, etc.

Sampling Method

The universe of the sample consists of Problems and Prospects of women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari District. The present research has considered Kanniyakumari district as the study area since it has the lengthiest coast in Tamil Nadu. Fisheries is the major source of employment in them coastal economy and it also consists of different types of activities in fisheries ranging from marketing and dry fishing to salt making. In all these economic activities women also play a major role. The data required for conducting this study was collected by using a self- administered questionnaire specially designed to achieve the objectives, from women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari District. A total of 338 respondents were approached to get their views on problems of fish vending. The size of the sample is taken by using the Mean (Israel Method) based on pilot study samples. While calculated by this method the sample size of the respondents is 338. Since the census study of such a large number of members is very difficult and time-consuming, the investigator proposed to resort to the sampling technique. As far as the present study is concerned, the investigator has proposed to collect the data required from the sample population by adopting a simple random sampling technique.

Demographic Analysis

The demographic profile of the women fish vendors is closely related with problems and prospects of women fish vending. Therefore, it is important to study about the women fish vendors.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Variable	No of Respondents	Percentage
Age	Below 30	09	03
	31-40	72	21
	41-50	151	45
	Above 50	106	31
Total		338	100
Educational Qualification	Illiterate	138	41
	Primary	75	22
	High School	72	21
	Higher Secondary	20	06
	Any others	33	10
Total		338	100
Marital Status	Married	185	55
	Unmarried	36	11

	Widow	68	20
	Separated	49	14
Total		338	100
Religion	Hindus	46	14
	Christians	252	74
	Muslims	27	8
	Others	13	4
Total		338	100
Residential Area	Urban	73	22
	Rural	68	20
	Semi urban	197	58
Total		338	100
Income	Up to ₹1,00,000	24	07
	₹1,00,001-₹2,00,000	172	51
	₹2,00,001- ₹3,00,000	129	38
	Above ₹ 3,00,000	13	04
Total		338	100
Sources of Income	Fish	235	70
	Live stock	47	14
	Agriculture	16	05
	Land Income	18	05
	Other sources	22	06
Total		338	100

Source: Primary data

Table 1 clearly exhibits the demographic profile of respondents among women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari District. Under age-wise classification, 45 percent of the respondents are of the age between 41 and 50 years, 31 percent of the respondents are of the age above 50 years, 21 percent of the respondents are of the age between 31 and 40 years, and 3 percent of the respondents are of the age below 30 years.

The majority of the respondents are above 40 years of age, and very few youngsters are involved in the fish vending business.

In education-wise respondents, clear that 41 percent of the respondents are illiterates, the respondents with the education up to primary level constitute 22 percent, the respondents with the education up to high school level constitute 21 percent, 10 percent of the respondents are coming under any other education group, and 6 percent of the respondents have an educational qualification up to higher secondary level. Majority of the women fish vendors are illiterate.

Under marital status shows that 55 percent of the respondents are married, 20 percent of the respondents are widows, 14 percent of the respondents are separated, and 11 percent of the women fish vendors are unmarried. The majority of the women fish vendors are married. After marriage, to support their family, they are involved in the fish vending business.

Religion-wise, respondents reveal that the majority of the respondents are from the Christian religion, which constitutes 74 percent to the total population. 14 percent of the respondents are from the Hindu religion, 8 percent of the respondents are from the Muslim religion and the remaining respondents are from other religions, which constitutes 4 percent. The most important religion among the women fish vendors is the Christian religion, which constitutes 74 percent.

In area wise residence shows that 58 percent of the women fish vendors are living in semi urban area, women fish vendors living in urban area constitutes 22 percent and remaining 20 percent of the women fish vendors are living in rural area. Majority of the women fish were from Semi-Urban area.

Under Income wise classification, reveals that only 7 per cent of the respondents are having an annual income of less than ₹1,00,000, 51 percent of the respondents have income between ₹1,00,001- ₹2,00,000, 38 percent of the respondents have between ₹2,00,001-₹3,00,000 and above 4 percent of the respondents have income above ₹3,00,000. Majority of the respondents have average annual income below ₹2,00,000. which indicates the poor income status of the women fish vendors.

Sources of Income indicates that 70 percent of the respondents are getting income from fish, 14 percent of the respondents are getting the income from livestock, 6 percent of the respondents are getting from other sources, 5 percent of the respondents are earning income from land and 5 percent of the respondents are earning their income from agriculture.

Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women Fish Vendors

Overall socio-economic empowerment of women fish vendors was analysed with the help of mean scores and exhibited in table 2 given below

Table 2

OVER ALL SOCIO- ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FISH VENDORS

Sl. .No	Socio economic status	Mean score	Rank
1	My income level has increased considerably	4.73	I
2	My level of savings has increased	4.69	II
3	Responsibility	4.66	III
4	Fish vending changed my social status	4.63	IV
5	Improve working ability	4.63	IV
6	Empower to be responsible	4.62	VI
7	I have acquired assets, such as gold, land live stock	4.61	VII
8	Gained wisdom	4.59	VIII
9	I am more economically secured	4.57	IX
10	More independent	4.54	X
11	Increased self confidence	4.53	XI
12	More recognition in family and society	4.51	XII
13	Gained economic independence	4.50	XIII
14	Sufficient freedom to adopt my own approach to work	4.49	XIV
15	Able to participate in family decision making process	4.40	XV
16	Improved participation in political process	4.39	XVI

Source : Primary Data

It is evident from the table 4.33 that among the sixteen aspects. the respondents are highly empowered with the aspect that ‘my income level has increased considerably’ which has been ranks first with the highest mean score of 4.73. The second empowerment is ‘my level of savings has increased’ with the mean score of 4.69. ‘responsibility’ is ranked third as it has the next highest mean score of 4.66. Followed by that ‘fish vending changed my social status’, ‘improve working ability’, ‘empower to be responsible’, ‘I have acquired assets such as gold, land livestock’, ‘gained wisdom’, ‘I am more economically secured’, ‘more independent’, ‘increased self-confidence’, ‘more recognition in family and society’, ‘gained economic independence’, ‘sufficient freedom to adopt my own approach to work’ with the mean scores of 4.63, 4.62, 4.61, 4.59, 4.57, 4.54, 4.53, 4.51, 4.50 and 4.49 respectively and have next fourteen places. The least empowered are ‘able to participate in the family decision-making process’, ‘improved participation in the political process’, as they gain the lowest mean scores of 4.40 and 4.39, and have been ranked last as XV and XVI.

Impact of marketing performance variables on total sales of Women Fish Vendors

The multiple regression analysis is used to find out the relative importance of various factors which influence the total sales of women fish vendors in the study area. As there are several factors which contribute to the total sales of women fish vendors in varying measure, the linear multiple regression is considered to be the most appropriate statistical tool to assess the influence of independent variables on dependent variables. In the linear multiple regression model, used in this study, total sales of women fish vendors are taken as independent variable and quantifiable variable like nature of vending, places of purchasing fish, sources of purchasing fish, investment and sales products are taken as the dependent variables.

Regression co-efficient of the independent variables estimated through multiple regression analysis along with their ‘t’ values and co-efficient of multiple determination (R^2) for the total sales of women fish vendors is given in table 5.16

Multiple regression is

$$Y = Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \dots + b_nX_n$$

where,

Y = Total Sales, X_1 = nature of vending, X_2 = Places of purchasing fish,
 X_3 = Sources of purchasing fish, X_4 = Investment X_5 = Sales products.

TABLE 3

MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS. (TOTAL SALES OF WOMEN FISH VENDORS)

Source: primary data

SL.NO	Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	.166	.118		1.411	.170
1	Nature of vending	-.003	.020	-.005	-0.136	.906
2	Places of purchasing fish	-.014	.024	-.020	- 0.580	.567
3	Sources of purchasing fish	-.006	.022	-.010	-0.288	.785
4	Sales product	.022	.015	.051	1.512	.130
5	Investment	.798	.034	.786	23.348	.000*

*Significant at 5 % level

R-Value	R ²	D.fv1	D.fv2	F value	Significant
.793	.629	5	332	112.487	0.000

It is found (Table 5.16) that the coefficient of determinant (R^2) is 0.629. It is inferred that 62.9 percent of the total variation of the dependent variable ‘Y’ (total sales) is explained by the independent variable included in the multiple regression analysis. The ‘F’ ratio is also found to be significant. From the value of ‘t’ statistics corresponding to the

regression coefficient, it is found that the variable investment is statistically significant with total sales. The dependent variable investment have significant positive relationship with the fish vendors total sales.

From the table, it can be observed that one unit increase in investment increases the total sales of women fish vendors by 0.798 respectively.

Overall, while analysing the Multiple Regression equation with standardised coefficient, it is clear that investment has higher level of influence on total sales of women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari district. It indicates that one unit of change in this variable 'investment' makes a change of .798 units on the dependent variables i.e total sales of women fish vendors.

Findings

The majority of the respondents are above 40 years, and very few youngsters are involved in the fish vending business. The majority of the women fish vendors are illiterate. The majority of the women fish vendors are married. After marriage, to support their family, they are involved in the fish vending business. The most important religion among the women fish vendors is the Christian religion, which constitutes 74 percent. 58 percent of the women fish vendors are living in semi-urban areas, women fish vendors living in urban areas constitute 22 percent and the remaining 20 percent of the women fish vendors are living in rural areas.

The majority of the respondents have an average annual income below ₹2,00,000. which indicates the poor income status of the women fish vendors. 70 per cent of the respondents are getting income from fish, 14 percent of the respondents are getting income from livestock, 6 percent of the respondents are getting income from other sources, 5 percent of the respondents are earning income from land, and 5 percent of the respondents are earning their income from agriculture. Overall socio-economic empowerment of women fish vendors was analysed with the help of mean scores. Empowerment is high for the variables 'my income level has increased considerably', 'my level of savings has increased' and 'responsibility' with highest mean scores of 4.73, 4.69 and 4.66 and 4.63. Empowerment is low for the variables 'gained economic independence', 'sufficient freedom to adopt my own approach to work', 'able to participate in family decision making process' and 'improved participation in political process' with lowest mean scores of 4.50, 4.49, 4.40 and 4.39 respectively.

The multiple regression analysis is used to find out the relative importance of various factors that influence the total sales of women fish vendors in the study area. While analysing the Multiple Regression equation with standardised coefficient, it is clear that investment has a higher level of influence on total sales of women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari district. It indicates that one unit of change in this variable 'investment' makes a change of .798 units on the dependent variable, i.e., total sales of women fish vendors.

Conclusion

The study on Socio-Economic Problems and Future Prospects of Women Fish Vendors in Kanniyakumari District highlights the significant role played by women in the fisheries marketing sector and their contribution to household income and local economic development. Despite their active participation, women fish vendors face numerous challenges, including inadequate access to credit facilities, lack of proper storage and transportation facilities, price fluctuations, market competition, poor infrastructure, health-related issues, and limited social security measures. These constraints affect their income stability and overall quality of life.

At the same time, the study reveals promising prospects for improving the socio-economic status of women fish vendors. Government welfare schemes, self-help groups, microfinance support, skill development programs, digital marketing opportunities, and improved market infrastructure can enhance their business performance and financial independence. Access to education, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial training can further empower women to expand their economic activities and improve their decision-making capabilities.

Therefore, focused policy interventions, institutional support, and community-based initiatives are essential to address the existing challenges faced by women fish vendors. Strengthening market facilities, providing affordable credit, ensuring social protection, and promoting women's entrepreneurship can create sustainable livelihood opportunities. By overcoming these barriers and utilizing available opportunities, women fish vendors in Kanniyakumari District can achieve greater economic empowerment, social recognition, and improved living standards, contributing positively to the overall development of the fisheries sector and the local economy.

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