



An evaluation of income disparities between male and female street vendors of Harare in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study assessed income disparities between male and female street vendors in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Qualitative data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations and document reviews while quantitative data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. A chi-square test of male and female daily incomes showed that there was no association between sex and daily income of the street vendors. Instead, other factors helped to explain the income disparities between male and female street vendors. Although street vending bears the face of a woman in Harare, female street vendors earned less than male vendors. The reasons for low daily incomes for female street vendors included low capital investment; a majority of women traded in low volume and perishable goods such as vegetables, fruits and cooked food and less lucrative goods; female street vendors had less access to productive tools and financial capital and worked as commission agents or employees of other vendors; gender bias towards some goods like leather and electronic products which generally required a substantial investment that could only be made by male vendors and female street vendors operated in insecure and illegal spaces where they became easy targets of eviction and confiscation. The major problem faced by female vendors was their right to exist in the urban informal sector because their occupation was illegal. The government should provide vendors with viable legal space for their business activities and also simplify the rules and regulations that prevent them from carrying on their work with dignity and freedom.

Keywords: Informal economy; gender; segmentation; street vendor

Introduction

Street vendors have become an integral part of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Over the past few years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of street vendors in the major towns and cities of Zimbabwe. Harare as the capital city has the largest number of street vendors estimated at around 100 000. That number could have increased ten-fold over time. In India, street vendors comprise around two percent of the population (Bhowmik, 2000). Street vendors are part of an important segment of the informal economy. In fact, street vendors are the most visible occupational groups in the informal sector because they work on the streets or in the open private and public urban spaces. Chen, Vanek and Carr (2004) identified different occupational categories within the informal economy including casual day labourers in agriculture, and construction, small farmers, forest gatherers, street vendors, domestic workers in Export Processing Zone factories, or small unregistered workshops, homeworkers (industrial outworkers who work from their homes). Other categories identified include casual workers in restaurants and hotels, subcontracted janitors, security guards and gardeners and temporary office helpers or off-site data processors.

Although street vending is sometimes regarded as a public nuisance by those in the middle and upper classes (Bhowmik, 2000), it is a source of self-employment to the poor; it is a means to

provide 'affordable' as well as 'convenient' goods and services to a majority of the urban population and it contributes significantly to the urban distribution system. For example, street vendors help many small-scale industries to flourish by marketing the products they manufacture (Saha, 2011). In Zimbabwe, vending had become a respite for many unemployed people. Zimbabwe has over three million vendors representing about a third of the population. Of these, one million are found in Harare. The hordes of street vendors and other informal sector workers who now include university graduates demonstrate that under-employment and unemployment had reached crisis levels in Zimbabwe. Ironically, during the 1980s when the economy was doing well, over two million people were formally employed in Zimbabwe. In spite of this immense contribution to the economy, street vendors face humiliation, harassment and confiscation threats from municipal and national police officers and their working conditions are abysmal-with their average working days at least 12 hours long (Bhowmik, 2000; Njaya, 2014).

Generally the informal sector is highly segmented by location of work, sector of the economy, employment status, social group and gender. For example, the conditions of work and the level of earnings differ among the informal sector employees. And even among home-based workers, Chen et al., (2004) observed that there is a difference between those who work on their own account and those who work on a piece rate basis for a contractor or a firm. Men sell non-perishable goods while women are more likely to sell perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables (Chen et al., 2004). While a lot of work has been done to analyse the segmentation of the informal sector, not much is known about the gender dynamics of street vending, in particular, income disparities between male and female street vendors. Why do female street vendors earn less than male street vendors in Harare metropolitan? This study sought to fill this lacuna by studying a sample of 147 street vendors. In this study, a street vendor is defined as a person who offers goods and services for sale to the public without a permanent built-up structure from which to sell.

The present study is organised as follows. The background to the study and research objectives and questions are discussed in this introductory section. The research methodology and design of the study are explained in section 2.0. Section 3.0 provides a discussion on research findings. The conclusion and recommendations emanating from the study are discussed in the last section.

Research Objectives

1. To characterise street vendors in Harare metropolitan.
2. To explore the role of gender and labour arrangements in street vending in Harare metropolitan.
3. To test if there is association between sex of street vendors and daily incomes in Harare metropolitan.
4. To identify factors that contribute to daily income disparities between male and female vendors in Harare metropolitan.

Research Questions

1. How can street vendors in Harare metropolitan be characterised?
2. What is the role of gender and labour arrangements in street vending in Harare metropolitan?
3. How does gender influence the amount of daily incomes of street vendors in Harare metropolitan?
4. Why are there daily income disparities between male and female vendors in Harare metropolitan?

Hypothesis of the Study

H₀: There is no association between sex of street vendors and daily incomes in Harare metropolitan.

H₁: There is association between sex of street vendors and daily incomes in Harare metropolitan.

Research Methodology and Design

The study used mixed methods research (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative data collection techniques included in-depth personal interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations and document reviews. A semi-structured questionnaire based on the study's objectives (Bryman, 2009) was used as the basic tool to collect socio-economic and technical data pertaining to street vending. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher at the respondents' vending sites in the where the researcher used that opportunity to start group discussions with vendors present in order to obtain in-depth information. Descriptive statistics and non-parametric test (chi-square test) were used to analyse primary data obtained from 147 street vendors in Harare. The individual street vendor was the unit of analysis.

Presentation and Discussion of Research Findings

The following sections show the possible outcomes of the study and the corresponding percentages of these outcomes. In section 3.1 the nature and operations of street vendors are explained. Socio demographic characteristics of street vendors based on primary data are presented in section 3.2 while daily income levels are provided in section 3.3. Measuring income disparities between male and female street vendors and access to financial capital for street vendors are discussed in sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively while factors contributing to gendered daily incomes between male and female street vendors are provided in section 3.6. Section 4.0 presents conclusion and recommendations emanating from the study.

Nature and Modalities of Street Vending in Harare

The streets and pavements of Harare were teeming with men and women of all ages throughout the day selling all sorts of wares. More specifically, street vendors were observed in most public and private places including industrial and construction sites, fuel stations, graveyards, outside schools, clinics and hospitals, colleges and universities, government buildings, bus terminuses, railway station, church buildings, shopping and commercial centres, recreation centres, pavements, open spaces, road junctions and along virtually every street in the central business district and suburbs. These had become alternative shopping destinations where there were no permanent and designated market places for street vendors. Saha (2011) observed that street vendors have a natural propensity to assemble at public spaces because customers find it convenient to purchase them and hence find a 'natural' market for the commodities. The main problem with these public spaces was that street vendors were considered as illegal encroachers and hence they became targets of eviction by both municipal and national police.

Three categories of street vendors were observed in Harare, namely, stationary, peripatetic and mobile vendors. Stationary vendors carried out vending on a regular basis at a specific location with implicit or explicit consent of the Harare City Council. Peripatetic vendors carried out vending on foot. The mobile vendors moved from place to place selling their goods and services on bicycles, push carts and motorised vehicles. The street vendors of Harare, in a variety of formats sold their items from:

- Baskets, for example, fruits, sandwiches, vegetables, dried beans, butternuts, steamed mealie-cobs and sweets.
- Pushcarts, particularly, vegetables, fruits, mealie-cobs and potatoes.
- Backs of trucks or lorries and car boots for example, fruits, vegetables, mealie-cobs, cooked rice, *sadza* (maize meal) and meat, second hand clothes, shoes and mobile phones and/or accessories.
- Cloth laid on the ground for example, trinkets, cosmetics, soap, vegetables, fruits, indigenous herbs, mobile phones and/or accessories and books.
- Stalls, either individual or small groups of stalls on city sidewalks. Stalls also took the form of mobile markets in designated places on certain days especially weekends and public holidays. Items sold included second hand clothes, mobile phones and accessories, lap tops, electronic goods (such as stereos and plasma television sets), fruits and vegetables.

- Open public spaces outside the CBD where durable products such as refrigerators, stoves (from single to 4-plate stoves), furniture and even motor vehicles were sold. This category of street vendors were not part of the current study.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Street Vendors

The study showed that street vending in Harare was a female-dominated occupation though the proportion of male vendors has been significantly increasing over the past few years. Of the 152 respondents in the study, 53.9 percent were women while 46.1 percent were male. Completion of five questionnaires was disrupted by municipal police and these were discarded. Thus 147 street vendors were actually assessed in this study. Women were overrepresented in street vending because a majority of them conducted their businesses from their homes or on the streets. In addition, street vending as a source of employment is more attuned to the needs of women. Table 3.1 shows that the educational level among street vendors was generally high. Out of the total, 68 percent had attained 'O' level education. Of the total number of vendors, 4.8 percent comprised those who are university graduates. These had opted for street vending because it was the easiest means of earning a living as it required only a small start-up financial capital.

Table 3.1
Socio-demographic Profiles of Street Vendors

Parameter/Indicator	Gender (Frequency, n=62)		
	Female	Male	Total
Age (years)			
15-35	41	37	78
36-45	25	28	53
46-60	11	5	16
Over 60	0	0	0
Total	77	70	147
Marital Status			
Single	21	19	40
Married	43	46	89
Divorced	8	2	10
Widowed	5	3	8
Total	77	70	147
Educational Qualification			
Grade seven	11	5	16
Ordinary Level	49	51	100
Advanced Level	5	9	14
Diploma	4	2	6
Bachelor's degree	5	2	7
Master's degree	0	0	0
Other	3	1	4
Total	77	70	147

Source: Author, 2016

Daily Income Levels of Street Vendors

The data on the daily income (earnings) of the respondents in Table 3.2 reveal essential details concerning street vendors' standard of living and the amount and daily expenditures. The daily income of a considerable proportion of the respondents (28.6 percent) was found to be in the \$0-10 bracket while those in the next income trajectory \$11-20 were 21.1 percent. Meanwhile, those in the income brackets, \$21-30; \$31-40; and \$41-50 were 15.6 percent; 14.3 percent and 10.9 percent respectively while 9.5 percent of the respondents had the highest daily income of over \$50.

Table 3.2
Daily Income Levels of Street Vendors by Gender

Daily income, \$	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
0-10	27	15	42
11-20	15	16	31
21-30	14	9	23
31-40	7	14	21
41-50	9	7	16
50+	5	9	14
Total	77	70	147

Source: Author, 2016

A comparison of the daily incomes of male and female vendors showed that out of 77 female vendors in the sample, 27 (35.1 percent) fell in the lowest income range of \$0-10. The number of females in the income categories of \$11-20; \$21-30; \$31-40; \$41-50 and over \$50 were 19.5 percent; 18.1 percent; 9.1 percent; 11.7 and 6.5 percent respectively. From Table 3.2, it is evident that a majority of female street vendors are in \$0-10 income category. An interesting observation is that there are women in the highest income range. An examination of the daily incomes of male vendors shows that 21.4 percent fell in the lowest income bracket while 22.9 percent have daily earnings in the range \$11-20. About 12.9 percent have earnings ranging between \$21 and \$30 while 20 percent fall in the \$31-40 income category. A significant proportion, 11.7 percent of the male vendors fall in the highest income range compared to a mere 6.5 percent for female vendors.

A comparison of male-female daily earnings shows that a slightly smaller proportion of male vendors belonged to the lowest income category when compared to that of female street vendors. Meanwhile, a slightly larger number of male vendors have income of more than \$30, an indication that male vendors had a slight advantage over female vendors in terms of daily income levels. However, it is important to highlight that street vending like any other informal sector business activity is segmented by location, source(s) of financial capital, type of products sold, volume and terms of trade besides gender. All these factors should be considered when analysing income disparities between male and female street vendors. In this study type of products and/or services sold and sources of financial capital were considered.

Street vendors sold a variety of products including books, electronics, braids, trinkets, fruits, vegetables, fresh flowers, mobile phones (both old and new), mobile phone accessories, second hand furniture, recharge cards, second hand clothes, shoes and leather products such as hats and belts, stationery, snacks, soft drinks, kitchenware, furniture, paraffin, petrol and diesel, cosmetics, cooked food, grocery items such as sugar, bread and peanut butter. Some street vendors sold vehicles although these were not part of the study. The services rendered on the streets included hair-plaiting, mending shoes and clothes, mobile money transactions and car-washing. A common observation during the fieldwork was that both male and female street vendors sold a diversified range of products although men tended to sell a more diversified range of products than women. A majority of female vendors traded in perishable goods like vegetables, fruits, snacks and cooked food while their male counterparts mostly sold electronic products, mobile phones although an increasing number of men sold perishables as well. In-depth interviews with some vendors and simple observations during data collection revealed that their working conditions were generally miserable. For example, the business activity of a majority of women vegetable vendors started at 4a.m and ended around 10 p.m and they worked every day in the year. Those who sold their products in the central business district revealed that they started vending around 5pm after municipal police finished work for the day. Besides long working hours and perpetual boredom, the vendors had to contend with raids and confiscations of their merchandise by both the national and municipal police, harassment and exploitation (through

demand of bribes), rough weather (sun, heat, rain and cold) and lifting and hauling heavy loads of merchandise to and from the vending sites everyday.

Measuring Gender Gap in daily Incomes of Street Vendors

A chi-squared test for independence was used to determine if there was any association between two attributes, sex of the street vendor (*sex*) and daily income level (*daily income*). The rationale for using the chi-square test for independence was that one of the variables under study, *sex* is categorical (Landau and Everitt, 2004); simple random sampling was used to obtain the survey data and the number of observations expected in each cell of the contingency table for the sampled data is more than five (Landau and Everitt, 2004). Under the chi-square test, what does the null hypothesis say? The null hypothesis to be tested is that there is no association between *sex* and *daily income* level. The categorical variable *sex* has two rows, *r* and categorical variable (*daily income*) has four columns, *c*. The null hypothesis states that knowing the level of variable daily income level does not help us to predict the level of variable *sex*. In other words, the variables are independent. The alternative hypothesis states that knowing the level of variable daily income can help us to predict the sex of the street vendor. The null hypothesis would be rejected if the p-value is less than the level of significance. Support for the alternative hypothesis would suggest that the two variables are related, but the relationship is not necessarily causal in the sense that one variable “causes” the other (Gujarati, 1988, 1999; Verbeek, 2008).

The survey data were used to conduct a chi-square test for independence which tests the null hypothesis of no association between the variables *sex* and *daily income*. In other words, the null hypothesis states that one variable does not vary according to the other. The results of the chi-squared test for independence between category of *daily income* and *sex* are shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Chi-square Test of The Relationship between Sex and Daily Income Category

Sex	Income category, \$						Total
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	50+	
Male	15 20.0	16 14.8	9 11.0	14 10.0	7 7.62	9 6.67	70
Female	27 22.0	15 16.2	14 12.0	7 11.0	9 8.38	5 7.38	77
Total	42	31	23	21	16	14	147

Source: Author, 2016

The contingency table provides the observed cell totals and the expected cell totals. The results of chi-square tests show a statistically significant association between variables, *sex* and *daily income*. The chi-square test statistic is 7.96 with 5 degrees of freedom and p-value of 0.159. Since the p-value is more than the level of significance ($p > 0.05$), the researcher did not reject the null hypothesis and concluded that some factor(s) was/were not involved for the deviation to be so great. Not rejecting the null hypothesis means that there was no evidence that the daily income distribution was statistically the same between the income categories. The test does not say anything about causality between variables *sex* and *daily income*. However, given that there is dependence between the two variables, it can be inferred that gender served to perpetuate the status quo. Other factors helped to explain the income disparities between male and female street vendors in Harare. According

to the survey data, a majority of male street vendors had more daily incomes than their female counterparts. But what were some of these factors? As noted above street vending is segmented by location, source(s) of financial capital, type of products sold, volume and terms of trade besides gender. All these factors should be considered when analysing income disparities between male and female street vendors.

Sources of Financial Capital for Street Vendors

The access to capital for street vendors depends on the volume of trade and types of the products they sell (Saha, 2011). Street vendors needed capital to start the business and later for running and expanding it. Table 3.5 shows eight sources of capital for street vendors in Harare. These include relatives, friends, other vendors, moneylenders, banks, donors, wholesalers and personal savings. A majority of the street vendors (44.2 percent) started their business with capital from relatives. Relatives were preferred because they did not charge interest. The other sources namely, other vendors and moneylenders were used for working capital or expanding the business activity. No street vendors in the study received credit from banks and wholesalers since street vending was considered illegal. Instead, street vendors depended on other vendors (through rotating savings clubs or groups), private moneylenders, friends, personal savings and donors in order to run their daily business. Table 3.5 shows that 8.8 percent of the vendors borrowed initial capital from moneylenders. The table shows that more male vendors (12.9 percent) depended on moneylenders than female vendors (5.2 percent). This was because most moneylenders were male who trusted male vendors more than their female counterparts as men repaid their debts on time. The private moneylenders however, charged high interest rates which drove many street vendors into debt trap which consequently hindered their growth and development. An interesting observation was that although no vendors received institutional credit to start business, they saved with some banks such as ZB, CBZ, Steward Bank and POSB. All the street vendors in the sample confirmed that they often used mobile money for business transactions and that they had Eco cash savings accounts.

Table 3.5
Sources of Financial Capital for Street Vendors

Sources	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Banks	0	0	0
Moneylenders	4	9	13
Other vendors	3	2	5
Friends	12	4	16
Relatives	30	35	65
Wholesalers	0	0	0
Donors	3	0	3
Personal savings	25	20	45
Total	77	70	147

Source: Author, 2016

Factors Contributing to Gendered Daily Incomes between Male and Female Street Vendors

Below are some of the factors identified by the street vendors as contributing to income disparities between male and female vendors:

- Female vendors sell items that require low capital investment, rather only working capital.
- Men work from better and busy vending sites or spaces.
- Men have greater access to productive assets and financial capital.
- Men are mobile vendors while women sell in one place. That is, men sell from push carts, bicycles or even cars while women sell from baskets on their heads or the ground or simply from a cloth spread on the ground.
- Men sell non-perishable goods while a majority of women are more likely to sell perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables.

- Female street vendors operate in insecure or illegal spaces.
- Men have better tools of trade.
- Women are unpaid contributing family members while men are heads of family businesses.
- Male vendors sell high value goods such as leather and electronic goods and even motor vehicles.
- Men sell higher volume and a different range of goods and services than women who sell smaller quantities and a narrow range of goods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The term 'street vendors' has become an indispensable part of urban culture in Zimbabwe and is now synonymous with the psyche represented by this culture. Three categories of street vendors were observed in Harare, namely, stationary, peripatetic and mobile vendors. In particular, the study identified various categories of street vendors including barbers, hair dressers, cobblers, garbage collectors and vendors of vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, snack foods and a myriad of non-perishable goods such as second-hand clothing and shoes, leather products, mobile phones, trinkets, cosmetics, indigenous herbs, soaps and electronic goods such as stereos, lap tops and plasma television sets. The chi-square test showed that there was no association between sex and daily income category of the street vendors-but that's all it says. Although street vending bears the face of a woman in Harare metropolitan, female street vendors earned less than male vendors. The reason for low sales and hence low daily incomes for female street vendors was due to a variety of reasons. Female vendors typically sold items that required low capital investment, rather, only working capital. A majority of women traded in low volume and perishable goods such as vegetables, fruits and cooked food and less lucrative goods. In addition, female street vendors had less access to productive tools and financial capital and worked as commission agents or employees of other vendors. Meanwhile, there was gender bias towards goods like leather and electronic products which generally required a substantial investment that could only be made by male vendors. Female street vendors faced heightened risks as they were more likely to operate in insecure and illegal spaces where they became easy targets of eviction and confiscation which affected their daily sales. The major problem faced by street vendors and women vendors in particular was their right to exist in the urban informal sector because their occupation was illegal. However, given that street vending had become the major, if not the sole source of livelihoods for a majority of people in Zimbabwe, the government should adopt an all-stakeholders approach towards vending in the country. The government should provide vendors with viable legal space for their business activities and also simplify the rules and regulations that prevent them from carrying on their work with dignity and freedom.

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