

A Study of Education and Income Level of Women Street Vendors in Imphal City, Manipur, India

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ABSTRACT The present study attempts to find the crucial linkage between education and income of women street vendors in Imphal City of Manipur, India. Primary data were collected from 350 women street vendors during 2023-2024 using structured questionnaires¹. For collection of data, a stratified random sampling with proportional allocation method is adopted for the present study. Based on the result of the analysis, women street vendors in Imphal are found to be mostly of an older age group with little or no formal education. Their earnings were found to be low and seasonal in nature. Based on empirical analysis, education was found to have limited impact on the income of the vendors although it was observed that basic formal education till middle school could positively raise their income to some extent.

INTRODUCTION

Street vendors are a common sight in the present global urban landscape especially in developing countries. It is considered as a viable source of livelihood for the poorer sections who could not get gainful employment in the formal or organised sector for various reasons. In the process, they make goods and services available to the urban population at an affordable rate thereby contributing meaningfully to the economy (Sonkar and Singh 2026). Apart from their economic contribution, they also help in enhancing the cultural and social fabric of the cities by encouraging social contact and enriching the urban cultures therein (Khan and Tariq 2025). A study by Chen (2018) indicates that in developing regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the share of informal employment is 88-89 percent of the total employment. Further, the street vendors comprise 2 to 24 percent of urban employment in Africa, Asia and Latin American cities (Roever 2016). In India, the phenomenon of street vending is rampant with NAS-VI (2021) estimating that there are approximately 10 million street vendors with the number increasing substantially day by day. Among the cities in the country, Bhowmik and Saha (2013) estimated that Delhi has the highest concentration of street vendors closely followed by Mumbai. One of the most plausible reasons for the ever

ballooning of their number in Indian cities is the inability of the country's formal sector to create sufficient employment opportunities thereby leading to the increasing size and share in employment (Bhowmik 2003; Jha 2018).

The 'Ema Keithel' or Mothers' Market at the heart of the Imphal city is the quintessence of the role of women in the socio-political and economic milieu of Manipur. The market, which is believed to be nearly 500 years old, accommodates approximately 5000 women traders and is the main trading hub of the state (Lisam 2021). A unique feature of the market is that it is one of the few indigenous markets in Asia run by women (Devi et al. 2022). Apart from a regular trading hub, it is the epicentre of various social and political movements in the state and played a pivotal role in the outbreak of the *Nupi Lan* in 1939 (Yambem 1976). The women vendors of the market stood in the forefront against British colonialism and the tradition still continues although their struggle has been diverted to other social issues.

Despite their contribution to every facet of life, study of women street vendors in Manipur are mostly confined either to social roles or their issues and challenges. As such, there is an absolute lack of studies regarding their economic status as well as their educational attainment and more importantly the linkage between the two. The study is an attempt to fill the void in

this area. Further, the need for the present study further arises as the majority of the vendors are poor having come from weaker social backgrounds and hence are vulnerable to all forms of insecurities that informal workers face (Salam 2025). As coming mostly from poor families, their education level is found to be low thereby adversely affecting their skill formation (Devi et al. 2022). Those vendors with no or little formal education on the other hand rely on traditional knowledge and skills passed on from the elders (Gyaneshwori and Hafida 2024). The present paper attempts to find answers to the question of whether education impacts the earning capacity of the women street vendors of Imphal city or not.

Literature Review

Street vendors are defined as those offering goods and services to the public in absence of personal built-up structures (Bhowmik 2005). The National Policy of Street Vendors 2009 of India also defined street vendors in similar lines while further categorising them into stationary, peripatetic and mobile. Aathirai and Lazmey (2023) interpreted street vendors as informal sector workers selling a variety of goods for their livelihood. Due to the absence of a permanent place and structure for plying their business, they constantly move from one place to another to sell their products. In fact, the hustle and bustle of urban life in India is hard to imagine without the street vendors. In the changing global scenario where there is rise in income inequality, street vendors play important economic and social roles (Recchi 2020). They also play a crucial role in the overall economy of developing countries by providing income and employment to large numbers of people who are left out from the formal employment sector. They also play a crucial role in linking the formal and informal sector and thus make available goods and services to the consumers at cheap prices. Street vending thus serves as an effective mechanism in the fight against poverty, unemployment and social exclusion mostly in developing countries.

However, their issues are more often than not viewed as an urban problem of overpopulation cascading into lack of employment coupled with issues which are country specific resulting

in recent emergence into the forefront of academic discourses and attention of policymakers alike. Further, academic discourse on street vendors is replete with studies of their issues and challenges as well as their role in the overall economy. One aspect which is often neglected is the determinant of their income or earning capacity. The present study focuses on the question of whether education is a determinant of the income or not of street vendors in Imphal city of Manipur state in India. With regard to the role of education on the income of street vendors, there are two divergent findings. While some studies found the level of education as an important factor in determining income, others have shown that there is no correlation between the two. Adhikari (2017) found that among the street vendors of Nepal, educational attainment plays a crucial role in generation of income. It was found that the business performance of educated street vendors was found to be much better than less educated ones. Another study by Begari (2017) in the case of street vendors in Hyderabad city in India shows that there is a positive impact of educational attainment of the vendors on their income. The level of education also determines the type of activity taken up by the vendors implying that educated vendors take up more income earning activities than those who are illiterate. Lyngwa and Sahoo (2025) in their analysis of the impact of education in encouraging financial literacy among street vendors in Mizoram state come to the empirical conclusion that education is a crucial facilitator of capacity building resources for street vendors especially in low-income settings. On the other hand, Setyaningsih et al. (2024) in a study of the determinants of income level of street vendors found that differences in the earning level of street vendors are explained by factors such as capital invested, number of workers employed and the period of business while education and gender have minimal impact. Similarly, Febriani and Setyowati (2023) in the study of factors which directly affect the income of street sellers in Java in Indonesia found that while factors like variable capital, length of working hours and duration of business are important determinants of income, education and age have little or no impact on their income.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. To understand the socio-economic and demographic profile of women street vendors in Imphal city.
2. To explore the educational attainment of women street vendors.
3. To find out the linkages between education and income of women street vendors.
4. To test a hypothesis that the level of educational attainment of women street vendors do not significantly impact their earnings.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a survey method based on stratified random sampling with proportional allocation. Samples were selected from women street vendors in and around *Ema Keithel*, which is situated at the heart of Imphal city. The survey was conducted during 2023-2024. Based on a pilot survey of 30 vendors selected through random sampling, 350 women vendors who are vending in and around *Ema Keithel* of Imphal west district of Manipur by using the following formula as employed by Varkevisser et al. (2003):

$$n = \frac{s^2}{e^2}$$

Where, 's' stands for standard deviation and 'e' is the standard error. For the selection of the sample, prior information based on the pilot survey conducted for the study of 30 vendors and the mean percentage score of financial constraints including income is found to be 65.03 and 's' (standard deviation of percentage) of financial constraints is 38.16. Further, the following assumptions are taken for the selection of sample size.

- ◆ Degree of precision = 95%
- ◆ L (margin of error) = 4
- ◆ e (standard error) = $L/1.96$
- ◆ = $4/1.96$
- ◆ = 2.04

After applying to the above formula,

$$= \frac{38.16^2}{2.04^2} = \frac{1456.18}{4.16} = 350$$

The Cronbach's Alpha ' α ' was adopted for the reliability test for internal consistency and

the score was found to be 0.797, which is considered as acceptable. The study in order to examine the linkage between formal education and the earning level of women street vendors employs descriptive statistics like mean, median, standard deviation and Kruskal-Wallis H Test.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides an in-depth age distribution of the women street vendors in Imphal city thereby highlighting their participation across the various age groups. The age distribution of the women vendors indicates the interplay of certain forces like economic necessity, physical capacity and accessibility of alternative employment opportunities at different stages of life. The miniscule representation of vendors below the age of 30 highlights the fact that street vending is rarely a choice of occupation for younger women due to factors such as availability of alternative job opportunities, lack of experience in plying the trade, or the harsh physical demand of the nature of work. As seen from the Table 1, the maximum number of vendors are of the age group of 50 to 60, as they turn to street vending in search for a stable income to support their household. At this age their experience and physical capacity are at prime, which makes them suitable to carry out street vending.

Table 1: Distribution of age of street vendors

Age of vendors	No. of street vendors	No. of street vendors (in %)	Cumulative percent
< 30	6	1.7	1.7
30 - 40	35	10	11.7
40 - 50	89	25.5	37.2
50 - 60	129	36.8	74
60 +	91	26	100
Total	350	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey, 2023-2024

A comprehensive analysis of the religious composition of the women vendors is given in Table 2 throwing light on how diverse cultural and religious identities intersect with economic activities such as street vending. The followers of Meitei and Hindu regions account for the lion's share of street vendors, as they account for the dominant cultural group in the region. Certain socio-economic factors like access to

resources, regional norms and community support system also contribute to their disproportionate composition.

Table 2: Distribution of religion of street vendors

Religion	No. of street vendors	No. of street vendors (in %)	Cumulative percent
Meetei/Meitei	162	46.2	46.2
Hinduism	154	44.0	90.2
Christian	18	5.2	95.4
Islam	16	4.6	100.0
Total	350	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey, 2023-2024

As seen from Table 3, majority of the women street vendors belong to Other Backward Classes while vendors belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) have identical and minimal representation. The ensuing caste composition could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the majority of the women vendors belong to the economically backward classes with the General Category comprising just 16 percent of the total sample. Secondly, vendors belonging to the ST and SC are grossly underrepresented highlighting the monopoly of the majority community in the trade.

Table 3: Distribution of caste of street vendors

Caste	No. of street vendors	No. of street vendors (in %)	Cumulative percent
OBC	260	74.2	74.2
SC	17	4.9	79.1
GEN	56	16	95.1
ST	17	4.9	100.0
Total	350	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey, 2023-2024

Table 4 provides a detailed explanation of the educational attainment of women street vendors revealing crucial insights into the relationship between educational attainment and their work participation in this informal sector. The diverse educational level of the vendors highlights the fact that vending provides a viable livelihood option for women across varying levels of education thereby indicating both opportunities and systematic challenges. As seen in Table 4, about 33 percent of the women street ven-

dors are illiterate, solidifying the fact that street vending offers a critical option for those who could get gainful employment in formal employment due to their lack of education. Further analysis of Table 4 reveals that about 11 percent have attained the primary education while 24 percent of the women vendor reached the high school level that is matriculation. However, women in this category may have faced constraints in getting higher educational qualifications coupled with lack of formal employment, thereby luring them to street vending.

Table 4: Distribution of educational level of street vendors

Caste	No. of street vendors	No. of street vendors (in %)	Cumulative percent
Illiterates	115	32.86	32.86
Primary	40	11.43	44.29
High School	82	23.43	67.72
Secondary	90	25.71	93.43
Graduate and above	23	6.57	100.00
Total	350	100.0	

Source: Primary Survey, 2023-2024

Table 5 on the other hand provides a broad overview of the earnings of women street vendors. As seen from Table 5, there is quite a diversity in the earnings of women vendors depicting the lack of uniformity in their earning capacity. Further, there are marked differences in the earning capacity of the vendors as their sales rise considerably during festive and marriage season. The survey also found that the ongoing ethnic conflict in Manipur since May of 2023 have adversely affected their earning capacity.

Table 5: Monthly income of the vendors

Income in INR	No. of cases	Percent	Cumulative percentage
Below 5000	67	19.1	19.1
5000 - <10000	85	24.2	43.3
10000 - <15000	97	27.8	71.1
15000 and above	101	28.9	100
Total	350	100	

Source: Primary Survey, 2023-2024

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics of the income with respect to the educational level. The mean of income is found to be different

across the level of educational attainment. It is evident here that women vendors with 'High School' education have the highest mean income. The women vendor with the 'Primary' level of education has the lowest mean income. Regarding the median income, women having the highest level of education have the lowest median income followed by the 'Primary' while the rest of the educational level has the similar level of median income of INR 10,000 per month. The largest variation in income, indicated by high standard deviation, is observed in case of those women having 'Graduate and Above' level of educational attainment. Beyond 'High School' level of attainment, education does not seem to have an impact on the earning capacity of women street vendors as evidenced from Table 6.

In order to statistically examine the relationship between earnings and educational level for the women street vendors, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test, which is non-parametric and considered as an alternative to one-way ANOVA, is conducted and the result of the test is shown in Table 7. One advantage of using Kruskal-Wallis over ANOVA is that it can be applied to data that are distributed normally, which is applicable to the data on incomes. With educational level across the five groups of "Illiterates", "Primary", "High School", "Secondary" and "Graduate and Above", considering the dependent variable, a null hypothesis is posited as the earnings of all the groups with different educational levels are the same. The number of observations in the five categories is 115, 40, 82, 90 and 23, respectively. The test output shows a difference in the 'Mean Rank', suggesting a gap in earnings across educational levels. The test result further shows the corrected χ^2 with 4 degrees of freedom as 16.614, having a 1 percent level of significance, thus rejecting the null hypothesis, which was posited as all the educational groups have the same level of earning.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of income by educational level

<i>Educational level</i>	<i>No. of observations</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>
Illiterates	115	10726.96	10000	7533.94
Primary	40	8750.00	8000	8142.17
High school	82	12751.22	10000	8569.75
Secondary	90	11138.89	10000	8791.90
Graduate and above	23	10708.70	6000	13012.12

Source: Primary Survey, 2023-2024

Table 7: Kruskal-Wallis Test: Mean rank of the different education level and test statistics result

<i>Education level</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>
1	115	172.97
2	40	136.06
3	82	206.04
4	90	177.18
5	23	141.28
Total	350	

Test Statistics		
<i>Income</i>		
Chi-Square	16.614	
df	4	
Asymp. Sig.	0.002	

Source: Authors' estimation from the Primary Survey, 2023-2024

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the women street vendors in Imphal city of Manipur. The study more importantly emphasises the intricacies of the linkage between education and earning capacity of women street vendors. The main findings of the study help in throwing light on the much talked about yet under-researched aspects of the socio-demographic along with economic and educational attainments of women street vendors in Imphal city of Manipur. More importantly, the findings of the study also help us in better understanding the role of education in the income level of women vendors in Imphal city. The study found that most of the women street vendors are of older age group as about 89 percent of the vendors are found to be older than 40 years of age. The overwhelming presence of elder women street vendors in Imphal is also supported by studies of Barua and Devi (2004), Sharma and Jayanti (2025) and Devi and Shirly (2025) whereby it is mentioned that street

vending is normally carried on by women of older age group. The overwhelming presence of older women street vendors underscores the economic pressures befalling the middle aged and older aged sections and its inherent balance with the demand of the job. The finding of the present study also confirms that women street vendors in Imphal city comprise mostly economically disadvantaged groups with a large number of them being illiterate. Devi and Sachdeva (2022) in their study similarly found that while using the Kappu Swamy SES score, the educational level of women street vendors in *Ema Keithel* is found to be low. Similar findings were observed in case of women street vendors in Kolhapur in Maharashtra where the vendors were found to have low levels of education along with high incidence of poverty (Rupe 2017). The finding is also consistent with the results of countless studies across the world which highlighted both the lack of education and overwhelming presence of poverty among women street vendors. The market as such serves as a viable avenue to augment their limited household income.

Regarding the crucial linkage between education and income, the finding of the present study also reveals that street vendors having attended middle school increases earning potential to some extent, and education beyond that level as such does not guarantee better earning. Consequently, other factors such work experience, type of goods sold, and location of the vending might have significant impact on the earning potential of the women vendors. Salimuddin (2020) in his study of the conflicts and challenges of women street vendors in Imphal also similarly mentioned that the earning of women vendors is determined by factors such as location of vending, season and the type of products sold. The same is resonated in the findings of Maring and Potsangbam (2024), which concluded that income of street vendors in *Ema* market is significantly impacted by the type of products that they sold. Further, apart from the type of products sold, Devi et al. (2022) in their anthropological study of women street vendors in *Ema Keithel* added 'season' as a factor affecting the income of vendors. It is mentioned earlier in the paper that the earning capacity of the vendors is significantly affected by the months

of year as during festive and wedding seasons sales increases considerably. Situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic completely froze their business to the point of pursuing part time jobs (Lisam 2021). Further, the prevailing ethnic conflict in Manipur, which has been ongoing since May 2023 severely affected the business of street vendors due to frequent curfews and shutdown of the market (Singh 2024).

Sharma and Jayanti (2025) in their study of financial literacy among women vendors in Manipur also found that income of the vendors is associated positively with experience and business maturity along with familiarity of the market. Age and experience of the women vendors in the business is also highlighted by Chachao-ba (2026) as significant determinants of the earning capacity of the vendors. However, as evident from the earlier literature review, there are also similar studies, which on the contrary concluded that education as a crucial determinant of the income of street vendors. A study by Dhamala and Kundu (2025) in case of street vending in Sikkim found that education among other factors is a strong predictor of income. Education is also found to be strongly correlated with income among street vendors in neighbouring state of Nagaland where it is observed that educated vendors earned as much as twice the income of the illiterate street vendors (Jamir and Pongen 2022). Their study highlighted the fact that educated vendors possess better business ideas and more tactfully deals with customers. Similar study by Devi and Shirly (2025) also concluded that education is a significant determinant of the entrepreneurial behaviour of women street vendors in Imphal city in Manipur. The contrasting views of the role of education on income level of women street vendors need to be better debated in academic forums as it could have profound policy implications in enhancing the income and consequently the living standard of the women vendors. As such, further research is warranted to understand the nuanced effect of education on the earning capacity of street vendors in general and women street vendors in particular.

CONCLUSION

Street vending is not merely a source of income and livelihood for thousands of women

who could not be gainfully employed in the formal organised sector. It is a way of life, and a manifestation of the socio-political and cultural landscape of not just Imphal city but also the whole state of Manipur. The epicentre of countless social movements, women street vendors occupy an indelible space in the collective psyche of the Manipurians in so much that they are addressed as *Emas* or mothers, irrespective of their age, caste, creed or religion. The present study focused on the socio-demographic status and more importantly the linkage between education and income of street vendors. Findings of the study highlight the fact that most of the vendors are of a relatively older age group coming from mostly economically backward groups with low level of education and income. Regarding the linkage between education and income, it is found that while there are considerable differences that emerge across the level of educational attainment, the impact of education on the earning capacity of the women vendors is found to be limited. On the other hand, factors such as age, experience, nature of goods sold, location of the vendors, etc. play a crucial role in the determination of their earning capacity. As such, there is a pressing need for further research to examine how education interacts with other important variables like age, working experience, nature of products sold, seasons of the year, etc. Understanding these dynamics will throw light on the much-needed targeted support strategies, which aim at enhancing the financial stability of the women street vendors in *Ema* market, which in turn could contribute to their overall well-being and economic resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study found that education has limited impact on the earning capacity of women street vendors, as they rely more on traditional knowledge and skills passed on from older generations. However, those women vendors who had attended middle school earned the highest income compared to the rest. As such, it is recommended that basic reading and writing skills could be imparted to those illiterate vendors who form the majority of the sample. By doing so, the women street vendors could be more receptive to various skill and entrepreneurial based train-

ing imparted by various sources. Moreover, basic literacy could make them aware of the various policies and programs implemented for their welfare. Apart from education, policy makers, academicians and NGOs should identify the issues and challenges facing them and accordingly devise policies and plans to enhance their livelihood. Further, vendors belonging to SC and ST may be encouraged more to be a part of the market by designating slots for them to increase their representation.

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