A Study on the Quality of Life of Urban Street Vendors in Kochi Corporation

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Abstract

Urban street vendors play an essential role in sustaining the informal economy, yet they often face social marginalization, lack of legal recognition, and poor working conditions. This study examines the quality of life of unauthorized urban street vendors in Kochi Corporation, using an interview schedule and the WHOQOL-BREF scale to assess four core domains: physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environment. The majority of respondents reported good physical health and positive psychological states, though mental resilience varied by age and educational background. Social relationships were generally strong, contributing significantly to better psychological outcomes, while perceptions of the work environment ranged from good to moderately satisfactory. Most vendors rated their overall quality of life as neutral, reflecting a balance of hardships and coping strategies. Inferential analyses using ANOVA, Independent Sample T-tests, and Correlation revealed significant links between education and mental well-being, and between social ties and psychological health, but no significant gender differences. The findings underscore the need for inclusive urban policies that recognize the contributions and vulnerabilities of unauthorized vendors, and promote improved living and working conditions for this often-overlooked population.

Keywords: *Quality of Life, Urban, street vendors, Kochi, WHOQOL-BREF*

1. Introduction

Millions of people worldwide rely on street vending as a source of income, making it a crucial component of the urban informal economy. Because they provide the urban populace with reasonably priced goods and services, street vendors plays a crucial role in the economic landscape of emerging countries. Nevertheless, in spite of their financial contributions, they

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frequently encounter a number of difficulties, such as legal restrictions, a lack of social security, and subpar working circumstances (Bhowmik, 2012). The quality of life of urban street sellers in Kerala, India's Cochin Corporation, a thriving metropolis, is the main subject of this study. Understanding the socioeconomic circumstances, difficulties, and general well-being of street sellers in this area is the goal of the study.

Over the years, street selling has significantly increased in Cochin, a city renowned for its thriving trade and commerce. The number of people turning to street hawking as a survival strategy has increased due to urbanization, unemployment, and rural-to-urban migration (Roy, 2020). However, street sellers frequently experience harassment from authorities, displacement, and restricted access to necessary public services as a result of the absence of official recognition and regulatory frameworks (Roever & Skinner, 2016). Because of this, their quality of life is still a worry that needs more research.

As a significant commercial center, Cochin Corporation has witnessed a number of urban development initiatives that have affected street sellers' means of subsistence. Despite the introduction of vendor policies and municipal laws, their efficacy is still in doubt because of uneven execution and low stakeholder participation (Chatterjee, 2019). In several Indian towns, including Cochin, the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which aims to protect vendor rights, has not yet been fully implemented (Sundaram, 2018). Therefore, evaluating the real-life experiences of street sellers in this region can help identify areas where policies are not being implemented effectively and offer solutions to improve their quality of life.

1.1. Urban Street Vendors

People that sell goods or services in public areas including sidewalks, streets, marketplaces, and other unofficial places in cities are known as urban street vendors. They play a vital role in the informal economy by giving urban residents access to reasonably priced goods and services while also making a living (Bhowmik, 2005). Selling food, clothing, and household goods as well as offering services like shoe repair, haircuts, and cell phone repairs are all included in the broad definition of "street vendor" (Roever & Skinner, 2016).

For many people who encounter barriers to official employment, street vending is a survival tactic and is frequently linked to self-employment. Urban street sellers often operate without legal authorization due to their informal character, leaving them open to harassment, abuse, and eviction (Bromley, 2000). Notwithstanding these obstacles, they are vital to urban economies because they satisfy the needs of low-income customers and support regional trade (Roever, 2014). Street sellers' recognition and regulation are still major issues in many developing nations, such as India, where laws and policies pertaining to vending are constantly changing to support their economic survival and solve issues of urban administration.

1.2. Quality of Life

Quality of life (QoL), a complicated and multidimensional notion that incorporates many facets of human existence, is a measure of an individual's overall well-being. Social relationships, psychological stability, physical well-being, the environment, financial stability, and individual belief systems are some of these aspects. Since QoL is subjective by nature, it reflects how people see and analyse their position in life while taking into account their objectives, cultural background, value systems, and the expectations of society. It encompasses

emotional fulfillment, purpose, autonomy, and meaningful social interactions in addition to monetary riches and physical health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines quality of life as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns" (World Health Organization, 1997). This definition emphasizes that QoL is deeply contextual, shaped by cultural norms and individual aspirations, and varies significantly from one person to another.

2. Review of Literature

Karthikeyan and Mangaleswaran (2013) conducted study on 'Quality of Life among Street Vendors in Tiruchirappalli City, Tamil Nadu, was based on 4 dimensions of quality of life namely physical health, psychological health, social relations and environment factor. The results obtained revealed that 55.4% of the respondents had low level of physical health, 51.8% had low level of psychological health, 73.2% had low level social relationship and 55.4% of the respondents had low level of quality of life in terms 42 of environmental factor. Overall quality of life of street vendors denoted that 50% of them had low level and another 50% had high level of quality of life.

Kaur and Kaur (2017) carried out a study named 'A Study on Quality of Work Life of Street Vendors of Khanna' evaluates the quality of work life of street sellers with a total sample size of 30 respondents. The results show that the majority of the vendors polled are illiterate, with just 13.33% having a bachelor's degree. They also make less than Rs. 500 per day on average, with many working 8–16 hours a day for meagre pay. The study comes to the conclusion that although street vending

is essential for urban lives, it is frequently disregarded in development initiatives.

Karunaratna and Tjandra (2021) made a study on ‘ A Glance into the Life of Street Vendors in Sri Lanka: An Overview’ that examines the vital role that street vendors play in the economy, emphasizing their contributions as unofficial businesspeople who offer reasonably priced commodities to the general public without the need for permanent buildings. The study analyses the social, economic, educational, and personal histories of street sellers in Sri Lanka using a triangulation technique that combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies. According to behaviour, intention, and demography, the results show a wide variety of vendors, with a notable rise in female involvement as a result of financial constraints.

Fonceca et al. (2022) in the paper "Exploring the Reasons for Street Hawking, Challenges & Quality Of Life of Street Vendors" gives a thorough summary of earlier studies on street selling and the unorganized sector. According to the literature, many street sellers are from low-income families and frequently put in seven to ten hours a day in order to earn a livelihood. The difficulties experienced by street sellers, including government disinterest, lack of legal recognition, and problems with harassment from authorities, have been affecting their overall Quality of Life.

Vijayabhanu et al. (2022) conducted The study on Thanjavur's street sellers' quality of life and sustainable growth highlights the importance of India's informal sector, especially street selling, which provides a substantial source of income for many people. It draws attention to the difficulties that street seller’s encounter, such as the financial strains imposed by organized shopping and the effects of digital technology on their means of subsistence. The findings show that age, daily income, and years of experience have a substantial impact on quality of life,

indicating that enhancing these elements may result in more sustainable growth outcomes for the area's street vendors.

Kumar and Sinha (2023) gathered data on the topic “A Study on the Quality of Work Life of Street Vendors in Prayagraj District” focusing on their working conditions and job satisfaction. With over 49.48 lakhs operating throughout India, it emphasizes how important street sellers are to the country's economy despite lacking permanent facilities. Most responders work four to eight hours a day, often selling fruits and vegetables, and the majority of them send their kids to public schools and these vendors have an inadequate quality of life, with many expressing discontent with their positions and a need for better prospects.

Tipon et al. (2023) undertook a study on “The Quality of Life, Lived Experiences, and Challenges Faced by Senior Citizen Street Vendors” in Bulacan, Philippines. Heideggerian phenomenology and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) were used in the study. Additionally, the motifs of "golden years," "socially connected," and "unknown journey" emerge. These topics brought the participants' struggles and experiences to light. Furthermore, it is strongly advised that local government organizations improve and closely oversee the current program that addresses physical and mental health issues as well as the safety and financial support of older persons.

Anupriya and Anuradha (2025) conducted a study on ‘Psycho-social and Economic Well-Being of Street Vendors: A Study of Mental Health, Social Networks, and Financial Resilience’. With an emphasis on social networks, mental health, and financial resilience, this study investigates the psycho-social and economic well-being of street sellers. Street sellers face major stresses that negatively impact their resilience and mental health, including inadequate social support and unstable finances.

3. Methods

3.1. Objectives of the Study

- To understand the Socio-Demographic profile of Urban Street Vendors In Kochi Corporation
- To assess the overall perception of Quality of Life Among Urban street Vendors
- To study the significant differences in the psychological health of urban street vendors across various socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education level etc…
- To study the relationship between Psychological Health and Social relationship of Urban street vendors

3.2. Hypotheses

H0: There is no significant difference between psychological health and age.

H0: There is no significant difference between psychological health and Gender

H1: There is a significant relationship between psychological health and social relationships among urban street vendors

3.3. Sample

The sample of the present study consist of 60 unauthorised urban street vendors within the jurisdiction of Kochi Corporation. Purposive sampling, a non-probability method where participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives were used. In this study, only those individuals who are unauthorized, above 18 years, actively engaged in street vending within Kochi Corporation and are willing to participate were included.

3.4. Tools

The interview schedule has been used as the main instrument for gathering data. To assess the Quality of Life, the WHOQOL-BREF instrument has been utilized. The WHOQOL-BREF is a widely recognized tool developed by the World Health Organization, for cross-cultural comparisons of quality of life across diverse populations. It is a 26-item scale that includes two general questions on overall quality of life and health, along with four specific domains: Physical Health, Psychological Health, Social Relationships, and Environmental Conditions.

4. Results

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Category	N	%
Age of Respondents	Below 20	**1**	**1.7%**
	21-30	**13**	**21.7%**
	31-40	**28**	**46.7%**
	41-50	**12**	**20.0%**
	Above 50	**6**	**10.0%**
Gender of Respondents	Male	**40**	**66.7%**
	Female	**20**	**33.3%**
Educational Qualification	Illiterate	**17**	**28.3%**
	Primary School	**15**	**25.0%**
	Secondary School	**15**	**25.0%**
	Higher Secondary	**10**	**16.7%**
	Graduate Or Above	**3**	**5.0%**

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, focusing on age, education, and gender. Most respondents fall within the 31-40 age group (46.7%), indicating a predominance of middle-aged street vendors. Smaller proportions are younger (21-30 years, 21.7%) or older (above 50 years, 10%), with only 1.7% below 20 years, suggesting that street vending is largely undertaken by adults in their productive years. In terms of gender, 66.7% of the respondents are male, while 33.3% are female, showing clear male dominance in this sector. Regarding educational qualifications, many respondents are illiterate (28.3%) or have only primary (25%) or secondary (25%) education. Few have completed higher secondary (16.7%) or attained a graduate degree or above (5%), reflecting generally low formal education among street vendors.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Scale Variables

	Category	N	%
Domain 1	Moderate	7	11.7%
(Physical Health)	Good	15	25.0%
	Excellent	38	63.3%
Domain 2	Moderate	12	20.0%
(Psychological Health)	Good	31	51.7%
	Excellent	17	28.3%
Domain 3	Moderate	10	16.7 %
(Social Relationships)	Good	33	55.0 %
	Excellent	13	21.7 %
	Poor	4	6.6 %
Domain 4	Moderate	13	21.7 %
(Environmental Conditions)	Good	44	73.3 %
	Excellent	3	5.0 %
Overall Perception of QOL	Poor	10	16.7%
	Neither Poor Not Good	27	45.0%
	Good	23	38.3%

Table 2 shows the quality of life assessment across WHOQOL-BREF domains, indicates that a majority of respondents

reported excellent physical health (63.3%) and good psychological well-being (51.7%), suggesting generally positive health conditions among the group. Social relationships were rated as good by 55%, though a small portion (6.6%) reported them as poor, indicating some level of social isolation. Environmental conditions were perceived as good by 73.3%, though only a few (5%) found them excellent, highlighting scope for improvement in living or working environments. In terms of overall perception of quality of life, most respondents rated it as neutral (45%), with 38.3% expressing a good perception and 16.7% rating it as poor. This suggests that while individual domains show generally favourable outcomes, the overall life satisfaction of respondents remains moderate, potentially influenced by broader social or economic challenges.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA test results of Psychological Development Domain with respect to Age of Respondents.

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
BELOW 20	1	17.3333	.	.	3.152	.021
21-30	13	15.3846	2.06311	.57220		
31-40	28	14.0952	2.32867	.44008		
41-50	12	13.4444	2.12410	.61317		
ABOVE 50	6	12.2222	1.16746	.47661		

*Significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 depicts The ANOVA results show a significant difference in psychological development across age groups ($F = 3.152$, $p = 0.021$). Younger respondents, especially those below 30, reported higher psychological well-being, while scores declined with increasing age.

The ANOVA results reveal a significant difference in psychological health based on educational qualification ($F = 10.021$, $p < .001$). Respondents with higher secondary education reported the highest psychological health scores, while illiterate

individuals had the lowest. This suggests that psychological well-being tends to improve with higher levels of education.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA test results of Psychological Health Domain with respect to Educational Qualification of Respondents.
*Significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

Educational Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.
Illiterate	17	12.4314	1.64893	.39992	10.021	<.001*
Primary school	15	13.2889	2.14501	.55384		
Secondary school	15	15.3778	1.77221	.45758		
Higher secondary	10	16.3333	1.05409	.33333		
Graduate or above	3	14.0000	3.05505	1.76383		

**Significant at .05 level (2-tailed)*

The ANOVA results reveal a significant difference in psychological health based on educational qualification ($F = 10.021$, $p < .001$). Respondents with higher secondary education reported the highest psychological health scores, while illiterate individuals had the lowest. This suggests that psychological well-being tends to improve with higher levels of education.

Table 5. Results of Independent Sample T-Test between Psychological Development and Gender

Gender Of Respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.	t	df
Male	40	14.7667	2.08945	.006	.940	3.388	58
Female	20	12.8000	2.18019			3.340	36.689

The independent sample t-test results indicate no significant difference in psychological health between male and female respondents ($p = 0.940 > 0.05$), suggesting that gender does not significantly influence psychological well-being among urban street vendors in this study

Table 6. Results of Correlation Matrix between the Domains, Psychological Health and Social Relationships.

Domains		Psychological Health	Social Relationships
Psychological Health	Pearson Correlation	1	.339**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008
	N	60	60
Social Relationships.	Pearson Correlation	.339**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	

The correlation analysis shows a moderate positive relationship between psychological health and social relationships ($r = 0.339$, $p = 0.008$), which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that better social relationships are associated with improved psychological well-being among urban street vendors.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to assess the quality of life and psychological well-being of urban street vendors in Kochi Corporation using the WHOQOL-BREF scale and various statistical analyses. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents are middle-aged men with low levels of formal education, reflecting the demographic nature of informal sector workers. Despite the physically demanding nature of their work, most respondents reported excellent physical health, suggesting resilience and adaptability in coping with daily challenges.

Psychological well-being showed significant variation across age and education levels, with younger and more educated individuals reporting higher scores. This highlights the role of awareness, coping mechanisms, and possibly access to resources in maintaining mental health. Interestingly, gender did not show a significant impact on psychological health,

indicating that both male and female street vendors experience similar psychological conditions within their work environment. Furthermore, the study found a moderate positive correlation between psychological health and social relationships, underlining the importance of social support in enhancing mental well-being. Although environmental conditions were generally rated as good, the relatively lower scores in overall quality of life suggest that broader structural issues, such as financial insecurity, unstable work conditions, and lack of policy support, may be influencing their life satisfaction. These results underscore the need for targeted interventions that go beyond individual health and focus on improving working conditions, strengthening social support systems, and providing access to education and mental health services for street vendors.

6. Findings

- The majority of respondents (46.7%) were aged between 31–40 years, and 66.7% were male, indicating a predominance of middle-aged men in street vending.
- Educational levels were generally low, with 28.3% of respondents being illiterate and only 5% having graduate-level education or above.
- Most respondents reported excellent physical health (63.3%) and good psychological well-being (51.7%), while 45% had a neutral perception of overall quality of life.
- Social relationships were good for 55% of respondents, but 6.6% reported poor social ties, indicating some degree of social isolation.
- ANOVA results showed psychological well-being significantly differed by age ($p = 0.021$), with younger respondents, especially below 30, scoring higher than older groups.

- Psychological health also significantly varied with educational qualification ($p < 0.001$); respondents with higher secondary education had the highest scores, while illiterate individuals had the lowest.
- The independent t-test showed no significant gender difference in psychological health ($p = 0.940$), suggesting gender does not influence psychological well-being in this population.
- A moderate, statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.339$, $p = 0.008$) was found between psychological health and social relationships.

7. Conclusion

With a focus on the unlicensed vendor community working inside Kochi Corporation, this study provides important insight into the quality of life of urban street sellers. The results show that a variety of factors work together to influence street sellers' quality of life. Despite the physically demanding nature of their profession, many vendors reported good physical health, making physical and psychological well-being important indications of their overall health condition. However, there were notable differences in psychological well-being according to age and educational attainment, underscoring the importance of social conditions, coping mechanisms, and individual resilience. The significance of social connections was also emphasized by the study, which found that people with robust support networks typically had better mental health outcomes. This suggests that emotional and social ties are just as important in maintaining street sellers' well-being as financial circumstances. Social work as a profession has a pivotal role to play in these initiatives. This research thus lays a foundational platform for further inquiry, policy development, and community-based action aimed at improving the safety, security, and respectability of street vendors across urban India.

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