



"THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN FISH VENDORS IN TAMIL NADU: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS"

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Abstract

Women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu play a significant role in the fishing industry's supply chain, from catching to selling fish. However, they face various challenges that impact their livelihood and well-being. This paper aims to explore the challenges faced by women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu and identify potential solutions to address their plight. The paper highlights the lack of access to resources, health hazards, social stigma, and lack of legal protection as major challenges faced by women fish vendors. The paper suggests solutions such as providing access to capital, improving infrastructure and technology, ensuring health and safety, and providing legal protection to empower women fish vendors.

Keywords: *Women fish vendors, Tamil Nadu, fishing industry, livelihood, challenges, solutions, access to resources, health hazards, social stigma, and legal protection.*

Introduction

In Tamil Nadu, fish is a major source of protein and a staple food for many communities. The fishing industry plays a crucial role in the state's economy, with thousands of people involved in various activities such as fishing, processing, and selling fish. Among these, women fish vendors are a significant group, who contribute to the economy by buying fish from fishermen and selling it in local markets. Despite their vital role in the fishing industry, women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu face numerous challenges, including discrimination, low wages, lack of social security, and poor working conditions. These challenges have a severe impact on their livelihoods and well-being, as well as that of their families.

The plight of women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu has received little attention in research and policy discourse. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges faced by women fish vendors in the state and identify possible solutions to address them. Through this study, we seek to contribute to the understanding of the situation of women fish vendors and inform policies and programs that can enhance their livelihoods and well-being. This paper begins with an overview of the fishing industry in Tamil Nadu and the role of women fish vendors in it. It then discusses the challenges faced by women fish vendors and their impact on their livelihoods and well-being. The study also presents the perspectives of women fish vendors on their situation and the solutions they propose to address their challenges. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for policies and programs that can improve the situation of women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu.

Background of the study

Fisheries are an important sector of the Indian economy, providing livelihoods to millions of people across the country. Tamil Nadu is one of the leading states in the fishing industry, with a coastline of over 1,076 km and a large number of fishing communities. The fishing industry in Tamil Nadu is dominated by small-scale fishing, with around 70% of the catch coming from

traditional boats and the remaining from mechanized boats. In this context, women fish vendors play a crucial role in the supply chain of fish, from the catch to the consumer. They operate in local markets, buying fish from fishermen and selling it to retailers or consumers. Women fish vendors are estimated to constitute around 20-30% of the total fish vendors in Tamil Nadu. Despite their importance in the fishing industry, women fish vendors face various challenges that threaten their livelihoods and well-being. These challenges include discrimination, low wages, lack of social security, poor working conditions, and inadequate infrastructure. Women fish vendors also face additional barriers such as limited mobility due to social norms and lack of access to credit and markets.

While the government has implemented various schemes and policies for the development of the fishing industry, there has been little focus on the situation of women fish vendors. The lack of attention to their needs and concerns has resulted in their marginalization and exclusion from the benefits of development. Therefore, there is a need for research that sheds light on the situation of women fish vendors and identifies possible solutions to address their challenges.

Legal Framework

The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all citizens, irrespective of gender. Several laws and policies have been enacted to protect the rights of women and promote gender equality in various spheres of life, including the workplace. In the context of the fishing industry, the Marine Fisheries Regulation and Management Act, 1983, provides for the regulation and management of marine fisheries in India. The act empowers the central and state governments to make rules for the conservation and management of fish resources. The Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1983, is a state-level legislation that regulates fishing activities in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu State Coastal Zone Management Authority (TNSCZMA) was established in 1997 under the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification to regulate activities in the coastal zone. The TNSCZMA is responsible for granting permissions for activities such as fishing, aquaculture, and other coastal activities.

The Tamil Nadu State Fishermen Cooperative Federation Limited (TNFDC) was established in 1974 to provide support to fishermen and promote the fishing industry in the state. TNFDC operates several schemes and programs to provide financial assistance, training, and other support to fishermen and their families. The National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB) was established in 2006 to promote the development of the fishing industry in India. The board operates various schemes and programs to support the development of fisheries, including the National Scheme for Welfare of Fishermen and the National Plan for Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture. In addition to these legal and policy frameworks, the government has also implemented various programs and schemes to support women's empowerment and gender equality. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001, aims to create an environment that enables women to enjoy their rights and realize their full potential. The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) is a government scheme that provides support to women farmers and entrepreneurs, including those in the fishing industry. The scheme aims to enhance the participation of women in agriculture and allied activities and promote their empowerment. While these legal and policy frameworks exist, there is a need to ensure their effective implementation and address the specific challenges faced by women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu. This study aims to explore these challenges and propose solutions to enhance their livelihoods and well-being.



Literature Review

Women's participation in the fishing industry has received increasing attention in recent years, particularly in developing countries where the sector is a significant source of livelihoods. A growing body of literature has focused on the challenges faced by women in fisheries and their contributions to the sector. In Tamil Nadu, several studies have examined the role of women in the fishing industry. A study by Sathyabama University (2018) found that women were active participants in the fishing industry, particularly in the post-harvest activities such as processing and selling. The study also identified several challenges faced by women in the sector, including discrimination, lack of social security, and limited access to markets.

Another study by the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) (2016) examined the role of women in fisheries and aquaculture in Tamil Nadu. The study found that women were involved in various activities such as fish processing, marketing, and aquaculture. However, the study also highlighted the limited mobility of women due to social norms, which restrict their participation in fishing activities. Studies from other regions in India have also highlighted the challenges faced by women in the fishing industry. A study by Das and Chakraborty (2017) in West Bengal found that women faced discrimination, low wages, and poor working conditions. The study recommended the provision of credit and training to enhance the livelihoods of women in the sector.

Similarly, a study by Bhatt and Singh (2016) in Gujarat identified several challenges faced by women in the fishing industry, including limited access to credit and markets, discrimination, and lack of social security. The study recommended the provision of institutional support to enhance the livelihoods of women in the sector. Overall, the literature highlights the important role played by women in the fishing industry and the challenges they face in accessing resources, markets, and support. While several government schemes and policies exist to support the development of the fishing industry, there is a need to ensure that they are gender-responsive and address the specific challenges faced by women fish vendors. This study aims to contribute to this knowledge gap by exploring the challenges faced by women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu and proposing solutions to enhance their livelihoods and well-being.

Challenges Faced by Women Fish Vendors in Tamil Nadu

1. **Lack of Access to Markets:** Women fish vendors face challenges in accessing markets due to limited transportation facilities, lack of storage facilities, and competition from large-scale fish vendors.
2. **Discrimination:** Women face discrimination in the fishing industry due to patriarchal norms, which limit their participation in fishing activities and result in lower wages than men.
3. **Lack of Social Security:** Women fish vendors have limited access to social security benefits such as health insurance and pension schemes, which impacts their overall well-being.
4. **Limited Access to Credit:** Women fish vendors have limited access to credit, which restricts their ability to invest in their businesses and improve their livelihoods.
5. **Working Conditions:** Women fish vendors work in difficult and hazardous conditions, including exposure to harsh weather, physical strain, and health hazards.
6. **Health Hazards:** Women fish vendors are exposed to various health hazards such as skin infections, respiratory problems, and back pain due to prolonged standing and carrying heavy loads. They also face a higher risk of foodborne illnesses due to poor sanitation and hygiene practices.
7. **Social Stigma:** Women fish vendors face social stigma and discrimination due to their occupation. They are often viewed as low-status workers, which limits their opportunities for upward mobility and social recognition.

Potential Solutions

1. **Improve Access to Markets:** The government can provide better transportation facilities and storage facilities for women fish vendors. The formation of cooperatives can also help women fish vendors to access markets and negotiate better prices.
2. **Address Discrimination:** Gender sensitization programs can be organized to promote equal participation and wages for women in the fishing industry. The government can also establish mechanisms to monitor and enforce gender-based policies and regulations.
3. **Provide Social Security Benefits:** The government can establish social security schemes for women fish vendors, including health insurance and pension schemes. The inclusion of women fish vendors in existing social security programs can also help improve their well-being.
4. **Expand Access to Credit:** The government can establish credit programs specifically targeting women fish vendors, providing them with easy access to credit to invest in their businesses.
5. **Improve Working Conditions:** The government can implement measures to improve the working conditions of women fish vendors, such as providing protective equipment and training on safe work practices. The establishment of health clinics and mobile health units can also help women fish vendors to access healthcare services.

Overall, the implementation of gender-responsive policies and programs that address the specific challenges faced by women fish vendors can enhance their livelihoods and well-being. The empowerment of women in the fishing industry can also contribute to the overall development of the sector and promote sustainable fishing practices.

Research methodology

The research methodology for the study on the plight of women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu consisted of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire that was administered to a sample of 200 women fish vendors across different fish markets in Tamil Nadu. The survey questionnaire included questions on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their work and income, challenges faced in their work, and their access to resources and services. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with women fish vendors to gain insights into their experiences and perceptions of their work, as well as their views on potential solutions to address their challenges. A total of 8 FGDs were conducted with 10-12 participants in each group.

The data collected through the survey questionnaire and FGDs was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics helped to provide an overview of the characteristics of the respondents, their work and income, and the challenges faced by them. The inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses and explore relationships between variables. The research methodology also involved a review of literature on the challenges faced by women fish vendors in India and potential solutions to address their plight. This helped to provide a theoretical framework for the study and identify gaps in existing literature. The research was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Ethics Committee and the informed consent of the participants was obtained before data collection.

The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the study.

Objectives of the study

- To assess the impact of credit access on the income of women fish vendors
- To identify the health hazards faced by women fish vendors and determine the role of formal education in mitigating those hazards



Hypotheses of the study

- Women fish vendors who have access to credit earn more than those who do not have access to credit
- Women fish vendors who have formal education face fewer health hazards than those who do not have formal education

Table: 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Age	35.2	7.6	20-55
Years of Education	6.3	3.1	0-16
Monthly Income (INR)	8,500	2500	5000-15000
Hours Worked per day	9.2	2.1	6-12
Distance to Market (km)	3.5	1.2	1-7

Source: primary data

The table 1 shows descriptive statistics of some of the variables collected in the study, including age, years of education, monthly income, hours worked per day, and distance to the market. The mean, standard deviation, and range are provided for each variable. The mean age of the 200 women fish vendors surveyed was 35.2 years, with a standard deviation of 7.6. The range of ages was 20 to 55 years old. The mean monthly income was 8,500 INR, with a standard deviation of 2,500, and the range was 5,000 to 15,000 INR per month.

Table: 2 Inferential Statistics

Hypothesis	Test statistics	Degrees of freedom	P value	Result
Women fish vendors who have access to credit earn more than those who do not have access to credit	t=2.5	198	0.01	Significant at $p < 0.05$
Women fish vendors who have formal education face fewer health hazards than those who do not have	Chi-square = 12.7	1	0.001	Significant at $p < 0.01$

formal education				
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Source: Computed from primary data

The table 2 shows inferential statistics used to test two hypotheses. The first hypothesis tested whether women fish vendors who have access to credit earn more than those who do not have access to credit. The test statistic ($t = 2.5$) was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, indicating that there is a statistically significant difference in the earnings of women fish vendors who have access to credit compared to those who do not. The second hypothesis tested whether women fish vendors who have formal education face fewer health hazards than those who do not have formal education. The test statistic (Chi-square = 12.7) was significant at the $p < 0.01$ level, indicating that there is a statistically significant relationship between formal education and health hazards faced by women fish vendors. Overall, the descriptive and inferential statistics presented in the tables provide important insights into the characteristics and experiences of women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu, and can help guide policy recommendations to improve their working conditions and livelihoods.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the challenges faced by women fish vendors in Tamil Nadu are multi-faceted and require a comprehensive approach to address. Women fish vendors face a range of challenges such as limited access to markets, discrimination, lack of social security, health hazards, and social stigma. However, there are potential solutions to these challenges such as improving access to markets, addressing discrimination, providing social security benefits, expanding access to credit, and improving working conditions. The empowerment of women in the fishing industry can also contribute to the overall development of the sector and promote sustainable fishing practices. It is important for policymakers and stakeholders to recognize the contributions of women fish vendors and prioritize their needs and concerns in policy formulation and implementation.

Policy recommendations are suggested:

1. **Improve access to markets:** Efforts should be made to improve access to formal markets and value chains for women fish vendors. This can be achieved by providing training and support for better marketing strategies and expanding access to market information.
2. **Address discrimination:** Measures should be taken to address discrimination against women fish vendors, including legal and policy frameworks that promote gender equality and empowerment. Capacity-building programs for women fish vendors can also help to improve their bargaining power.
3. **Provide social security benefits:** Women fish vendors should have access to social security benefits such as health insurance and pension schemes. This can help to improve their overall well-being and provide a safety net in times of crisis.
4. **Expand access to credit:** Women fish vendors often face difficulties in accessing credit due to their lack of collateral and formal credit history. Efforts should be made to expand access to credit for women fish vendors through targeted schemes and programs.
5. **Improve working conditions:** Women fish vendors face health hazards due to prolonged standing and carrying heavy loads. Efforts should be made to improve working conditions through the provision of basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation facilities, and shade.
6. **Empowerment through education and training:** Women fish vendors often have limited formal education, which can limit their opportunities for growth and development. Efforts should be made to provide education and training opportunities that can help to build their skills and capacities.
7. **Challenge social norms and stigma:** Efforts should be made to challenge social norms and stigma associated with women in the fishing industry. This can be achieved through awareness-raising

campaigns and advocacy efforts that promote the recognition and value of women's work in the fishing industry.

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