

Experiences and Perceptions of Economically Marginalised Women Food Vendors: An Exploratory Study of Informal Food Traders in Durban, South Africa.

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Abstract

Informal food vending has grown as a form of employment in South Africa's cities and rural districts, particularly post 1994. For many, participating in informal food vending is the only option to earn a livelihood. The aim of this study was to describe the conditions of women who live on the margins of society and struggle as informal food vendors. Through purposive sampling, 12 qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with black African women in the Durban central business district. Findings show the majority of participants lack support from their male spouses despite the labour intensive work that they are forced to do. Unorthodox cooking skills are required to prepare meals for customers and efficiency in production and marketing is required because the sales contribute to family livelihoods. Findings highlight the abuse and exploitation these vendors are exposed to by unscrupulous municipal officials and the lack of municipal and organised labour assistance to address their economic marginalisation and social repression. This study highlights the challenges that these women face in the informal economy and their negative perceptions of civic organisations in Durban, South Africa.

Key words: Informal trading, street traders, street food vendors, Black African Women, food hawkers, South Africa.

Introduction

Informal economies within developing states have become a norm for many societies. It has been estimated that the majority of workers earn their livelihoods the informal way and statistics have indicated that informal employment comprises more than 50% of non-agricultural employment globally. In some regions in South Asia, informal employment is at a rate of 82% and within sub-Saharan African countries it is on a continual increase (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013). In South Africa the mainstream economy has been unable to provide sufficient employment opportunities – for youth in particular, and people seeking work more generally.

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Therefore, informal trading has grown in frequency and for many South Africans this has become one of very few options to earn a livelihood (Mukhola, 2015).

Informal trading has for decades become a continuous source of income for many of Durban's unemployed male and female citizens (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013). Besides becoming central to street life in developing nations, informal trading has contributed to family incomes for many who lack formal education and who have been historically socially marginalised during Apartheid and continue to suffer the same fate in a post-Apartheid society (Willemse, 2011). The post-Apartheid economy of South Africa has been riddled with pre-existing financial structural deficiencies and the present financial challenges within both private and public enterprises, contributing to a two decade long inability to create jobs. During the period of transition from Apartheid to democracy, South Africa's apartheid regime had a debt totaling 80 billion dollars of which 45 billion dollars was public debt (Macanda, 2018). The present fiscal challenges are due to a contraction in the country's gross domestic product, worsened by the global pandemic. In addition, South Africa's credit rating has been demoted to junk status which impacts on the feasibility of initiating sustainable infrastructure projects and commercial business ventures that are vital for economic growth (Conje, 2020).

South African enterprises (private and public) have fiscal woes that have resulted from an interplay of many factors such as mismanagement, corruption, lack of strategic planning and the challenges of being immersed in the present stagnant economy with its high rates of unemployment and underemployment. In addition low skill and literacy levels, and a lack of relevant training and quality education in South Africa contribute to the instability of the polity and economy, resulting in high levels of public protest (Chetty & Owusu-Ampomah, 2018). In February 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa indicated in his State of the Nation address that despite the national government's attempts to create jobs, unemployment levels are still on the rise and that as a nation we cannot depend on government alone to address these challenges. Statistics SA in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) stipulated that during the last quarter of the year 2019 at least 40% of South Africa's youth (18 to 34 year olds) were unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2020). In addition, this figure includes those that are not enrolled at any skills training facility or tertiary educational institution such as universities and colleges. With an unofficial unemployment rate of 50%, it is unsurprising that increasing numbers of people have little choice but to create livelihoods within the informal economy of South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

This paper primarily pays attention to female street food vendors because of the growing feasibility of female entrepreneurship in developing countries (Dumbu, 2018). Female owned and managed businesses have become survival strategies for many women and, globally, the number of female headed businesses have increased. Research has indicated that women are empowered to gain control over their personal lives' thorough entrepreneurship (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015). Global research based on the development of female entrepreneurship has also gradually increased, emphasising that South African women are still lagging behind the rest of the world in relation to the number of female entrepreneurs. South African women constitute 52% of South Africa's population, yet women are still challenged by historical racial issues, such as poverty, which has also been responsible for high ratios of illiteracy and the lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills amidst women that prohibit their success. Many South African women have not had access to business management knowledge, training, skills, financial assets and resources. As a result street vending has become a survival strategy (Mulaudzi & Schachtebeck, 2022). Their need to earn an income is further exacerbated by the pressure to support extended families and the prevalence of single female headed households in South Africa at present. This has been

further entrenched by patriarchal African cultures. The gender assigned roles of parenting and homemaking in addition to their entrepreneurship double their challenges as individuals (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015).

It is therefore important that studies document the experiences and perceptions of females employed in the informal sector in the post-Apartheid democratic era of South Africa. (Mukhola, 2015). This study contributes towards the acknowledgement of the value women entrepreneurs add to economic development and employment creation in a strained economy. These studies also help us to identify diverse modes of entrepreneurship and local economic practices (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015).

Literature review

Research that investigates the challenges that South African informal traders face focusses on union revival, trading policies, municipal deregulations and regulations and overall analyses of the informal economy in South Africa (Skinner, 2008; Willemse, 2011; Pezzanio, 2016). Willemse (2011) and Cohen (2010), have focused on the impact of the instability of the global economy on the marginalised workers in the world. Most studies on Durban's food vendors have been broadly assimilated into studies which focus on street traders collectively with a lack of categorization of street vendors that retail cooked foods and or pre-prepared or ready to eat snacks. Skinner's (2009) paper focussed on the street traders in Warwick Junction in the Durban CBD in relation to poverty and gender inequality. Other recent publications (2010 to 2017) focus on union revival, the street trader's union and the linkages of these organizations to large trade union movements that serve South Africa's labour force (Çelik, 2011; Gbaffou, 2016; Webster, 2017). Çelik (2011) articulates the capacity of street traders to be able to develop alliances with other marginalised groups (community movements) within Durban. Mottiar's (2019) study pays attention to the ongoing negotiations and disputes between municipal authorities and street vendors about the legalities of informal traders permits.

Skinner (2008) published a paper that focused on the exclusion and inclusion of street traders in Durban. She explains that appropriate regulation of street traders can only be successful with the participation of the street traders themselves. She emphasized that solidarity and collective action amongst street traders are pivotal to ensuring gains:

Collective action is demonstrated to be one of the few routes to secure gains for traders, since individually they are weak in the face of large bureaucracies and powerful private sector interests. SEWU's interventions, for example, have doubtlessly helped secure a gender sensitive and more progressive approach to street traders in Durban. (Skinner, 2008: 239)

The study by a journalist (reported in the Daily Maverick, 28 July 2018) illustrates that there are various forms of abuse that street traders experience. Interviewees explained that they have experienced bullying and harassment from both Municipal Officials and Trade Union Leaders. The interviewees describe those days as emotionally tormenting and intimidating. They explain that at times they are too intimidated to trade which has resulted in income loss for that day.

The last scholarly output (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013) which had a similar object to

document the woes of female women vendors in Durban, South Africa was published in the year 2013. Studies (Gamielien & van Niekerk, 2017 & Burger & Fourie, 2019) that followed this study thereafter focus on both male and female street vendors. Their area of fieldwork includes other provinces of South Africa, and is not specific to Durban. Since then journalists have attempted to bridge the gap with media reports that document the challenges and experiences of street vendors. These media reports are rare and the reports often represent one or two voices. This primary data is not sufficient for scientific contributions towards scholarly research output. Many of these reports emphasize the lack of government support that these traders experience and the types of irregularities they experience with processes of trade permits applications and renewal, municipal support structures and the lack of efficacy of trade unions (Xolo, 2018).

Other scholarly research that attempt to document the plight of these street vendors are mentioned in studies that broadly address the informal economy of South Africa. Similar international studies (Guma, 2015; ILO, 2018 & Diallo, Yin, & Beckline, 2017) incorporate all professions within the informal economy. These studies are often based from the perspectives of urbanization, social policy, urban economics and urban geography. More recent local and international studies (WIEGO, 2021) are focused on the impact of lockdown regulations and document the survival approaches of those employed in the informal economy. Studies that pay particular focus to female street vendors are scarce. The most recent one (Thulare & Moyo, 2021) is focused on an area outside of the central business district of Durban, but pays attention to both male and female street vendors in KwaZulu-Natal. Central to this study is the focus on female street vendors that specialize in the preparation and selling of foods both freshly prepared and prepacked. Therefore this micro study is unique in its contribution to the collective literature available of women in the informal economy of South Africa.

Context

Unemployment & Street Trading in South Africa

Baldry (2016) explains that even though we are in the post-Apartheid era with an overall inclusive approach to address inequality, race is still a predicating factor within the job market. Black African graduates are less likely to be employed than their Indian, White and Coloured counterparts. Yu (2013) affirms that limited resources and inadequate high school education contribute to the rising youth unemployment statistics through high university and college attrition ratios. Proficiency in English also poses significant problems. The majority of these graduates have no choice but to become innovative in their approach towards creating a sustainable livelihood for themselves. As a result of such conditions, South Africa, and developing nations globally have seen an escalation of small business initiatives and informal trading of various kinds.

Historically, informal traders have lacked legal recognition and protection, as well as a sense of belonging to an entrepreneurial network (Groundup, 2018) . Despite frequent protests from street trader organisations in the city centre of Durban, trader perceptions of the role that these organisations play have been negative, limiting their impact (Mottiar, 2019). Street traders have opted to create solidarity amongst themselves to assist and protect each other from authorities in relation to trade irregularities and harassment.

From 2004 to 2009, public participatory strategies were incorporated into the South African Legislative Sector. The focus was to be inclusive and participatory in varying sectors of the South African economy. A framework was developed for The South African Legislative Sector

in 2013 (South African Legislative Sector, 2013).

This paper aims to highlight the value of informal trading within the South African economy. Under neo-liberal economic conditions informal trading has become necessary for the reduction of poverty. It has been estimated that there are approximately over one million street vendors in South Africa and that for many, this is their only form of income. In the early 1990's one third of the city's population was already integrated into the informal economy and this sector was escalating and outpacing the formal sector (Rogan, 2012 cited in Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013). The business and hospitality sectors, especially over the December festive period, usually recruit people on a temporary basis to offer better services to international and local tourists and to cope with increased demand during this period.

Defining informal employment, food vendors, food stalls, food hawkers and street food vendors and/or traders

Informal employment concepts have been defined according to both government legislation and labour organisations who have shaped these terms to be appropriate for their varied pragmatic purposes. The International Labour Office (ILO), the international Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics (called the Delhi Group), and the global network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) based in Delhi, India have coined a broad definition of Informal employment. Informal employment has been divided into 2 broad types, namely informal self-employment and employees working in informal enterprises that they do not own. Informal self-employment includes workers that are self-employed within the informal economy. Descriptions of self-employed informal traders include traders in fresh produce, cooked foods, and other amenities from their vehicles, by foot or on cycle and from their designated stalls. Examples include the barbers located on Durban's City centre street pavements, women that carry baskets of food or fresh produce and retail their goods by walking through the streets of city and those that spend days, months or years at their designated vendor spaces retailing to the public (Chen, 2012).

Employees within informal enterprises include those that are employed on a long-term or short-term basis or even temporarily by the principal informal trader. In many instances, these employees are either family members or distant relatives that have been forced out of the formal low skilled employment sector due to the impact of globalisation and slow economic growth. Economic and political instability, and the onset of the fourth industrial revolution transformed economies through digitalisation and new modes of production. This has contributed to unemployment which became a global concern prior to the recent global Covid-19 pandemic which hindered economies even further (Gheorghe, Sima, Subić, & Nancu, 2020).

In addition, these employees can also be referred to as hawkers (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013) They are tasked with the sale of goods by foot in and around Durban, retailing fresh produce, foods (prepacked and or freshly prepared) as well as items that are small-size and are portable. The lack of protective legislation and municipal regulations has led to informal traders employing child labour, the homeless, disabled and the elderly as hawkers within major city centres. Employment terms are often irregular, unjust and ad hoc (Gamielien & van Niekerk, 2017). These employees have no access to toilets and running water and are forced to walk the streets of city in search of sales (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013).

These informal traders have begun to trade almost all services and products on the roadside and have adopted an improvising attitude to thrive in their spaces. Many of these stalls lack refrigeration, electricity, furniture and appropriate shelter. Despite this, informal traders earned

between 13 and 66 US Dollars a day (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013). Street traders in and around Durban are those traders that have a designated place of trade and are mobile. Their mobility is often driven by their need to reach sales targets for the day or week. Often this is achieved through the employment of hawkers.

Street vendors trade and service almost all products inclusive of edible items, household and personal items: 'Durban residents can source almost any good or service from informal vendors' (Mkhize et al, 2013: 16). Previous studies have documented that female street traders primarily are trading cooked food and fresh produce and household goods, whereas men tend to dominate the retailing of electronics, clothing, clothing accessories, stationary, hardware and even toiletries. Wardrop (2006) in her study of street traders indicated that hawkers are usually Zulu-speaking women who sell food and drinks to male factory employees. Popular African foods such as gravies, pap and offals are semi-prepared at home and then transported on a mini bus to their stalls where it is cooked again before being sold. Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner (2013) affirm this and indicate that the products that women are trading attract smaller profit margins and can be more time consuming (i.e. the preparation of foods and traditional medicines).

The terms 'food vendors' and 'food stalls' are used interchangeably as a description for traders that retail their cooked and uncooked foods from a designated food truck, stall or allocated space on the street. The terms food stalls and food vendors have been used by both citizenry and academics to define food trucks and stalls that sell foods at open air market days, parks, and special events. Street food vendors is a term used to describe street traders that specialise in the sale of prepacked, raw and cooked foods (fast foods and or snacks which can be both healthy and unhealthy) to the public from the street, and not from an organised event or an open air market event. Examples include sandwiches, curries and roasted nuts and corn on the cob (Mukhola, 2015).

Within the South African context, food hawkers can be independent traders or employed by a street vendor which has a designated locality for trade. The street trader permit is inclusive of the stand or stall rental fee, however traders often arrange and agree upon their trading locality collectively (Mottiar, 2019). Some street traders have opted to recruit mobile street vendors to increase the sales of their food items. Often these hawkers are given a daily wage, or a percentage of the sales for the day or week. The terms 'hawker food' and 'street food' are synonymous and may be easily used interchangeably for scholarly purposes and non-scholarly purposes globally (Tinker 1997 and 2003; Yasmeen, 2001 cited in Henderson, 2017). For the purpose of systematic evaluation of the data collated, we differentiate between street food vendors and food hawkers in this study. The term 'Street food vendors' makes reference to street traders that sell food items from a specific stand or stall. Street traders that sell foods whilst walking around the city are referred to as 'food hawkers'. The term 'informal traders' is used in this study to collectively make reference to both street food vendors and food hawkers. The term 'Street vendor' is used to describe informal traders that sell other all other items such as clothing, cosmetics, accessories and small electronics. Local and international scholars all use these concepts interchangeably and also indicate customised descriptions for these terms in their studies (Tinker, 1997; Skinner, 2008; Çelik, 2011 & Burger & Fourie, 2019).

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was employed with an aim to record the experiences and opinions of these street traders through face-to-face interviews. This method of gathering data

is interactive, flexible and continuous: ‘A qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent. Ideally, the respondent does most of the talking’ (Babbie & Mouton, 2002: 289). The interview process allowed the researcher to better understand the daily challenges and lifeways of respondents. The fieldwork took place in January 2018. For this study a purposive sampling plan was used to select black women informal traders that trade daily in the city centre of Durban. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to easily identify subsets of a larger population which meet specified criteria for study participation. In this instance, study participants had to be black African females trading food items (fresh produce, cooked or prepared and or prepacked snacks) within areas of the city centre selected for this study.

Participants

Twenty-one informal traders were identified and approached. Only 12 informal traders willingly agreed to participate anonymously in the study. Participants completed a consent and anonymity form which was indicative that their participation was voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw from the interview process at any time. The anonymity was crucial as some participants expressed their fear of their involvement becoming known. The ethical considerations, process and the purport of the interview was explained in detail with participants prior to the study. Five of the 12 interviewees were South African, three were from Zimbabwe, two were from Malawi and the remaining two were Mozambicans. Seven of the 12 interviewees were between the ages of 26 and 35 years, and the remaining five participants were over the age of 45. Of these 12 informal street traders only three had been trading food on the street for more than two decades, two traders were trading for approximately a decade, and the remaining seven traders were trading for a period of three to 10 years. Seven of the 12 respondents either completed secondary school or some form of tertiary education.

Table 1: Tabulation of Nationalities and Education levels of informal traders interviewed

<i>Nationality</i>	Total Number	Did not complete secondary school	Completed secondary school	Incomplete tertiary education (College, Tech, or University)	Completed tertiary education
<i>South Africans</i>	5	2	1	1	1
<i>Zimbabweans</i>	3	0	2	0	1
<i>Malawian</i>	2	0	0	1	1
<i>Mozambican</i>	2	1	1	0	0

Nine traders had various reasons for choosing not to participate. At least four of them lacked clarity as to what this study entailed. Some traders assumed it was not an opportunity for them to lodge their personal grievances about the lack of basic amenities, police harassment experiences and the irregularities of the issuing of trade permits. Two participants expressed their perception that trade union leaders and or municipal authorities would assume that their role as the interviewee within this study could negatively impact their relationships with local municipal officers and members of the South African Police Services, with whom they engage

with on most days. One interviewee explained her reasons for opting not to participate in the study due to fear of the police, retaliation and risks to jeopardising the renewal of their valid trade permit through municipal authorities or employment from a principal street trader. The remaining street traders were unwilling to communicate their reasons for not being involved in this study.

Location of Study

This study was located primarily in five streets of Durban's city centre which run parallel and adjacent to one another. These streets are namely, streets Dr. Yusuf Dadoo Street; Dr Goonam Street; Anton Lembede Street; Joe Slovo Street and Dennis Hurley Street. In all five streets, women engaged in the informal food trade are present. There are 45 700 street traders in this location (Arde, 2021), so identifying the location of the vendors does not risk identification of participants.

Informal traders have organised themselves into demarcated areas based on the various types of products and services that are offered. Durban citizens are aware of which products are available in various localities. Fresh produce, women's dresses and accessories, electronics and clothing are all located in the 5 streets mentioned. Female food vendors, selling hot foods and freshly made snacks are located on Anton Lembede Street and Joe Slovo Street.

Data Analysis

Data collated from the interviews were analyzed according to the process of content analysis. The themes were systematically developed after noting the frequency of similarities in the responses from the interviewees. Crime, harassment and the lack of access to resources were dominant in interviews. The discussions below have been segmented accordingly.

Limitations of study

The value of this data lies in the documentation of the participant's experiences as street vendors in Durban. One of the key challenges of this study was our inability to converse fluently in African indigenous languages. Five study participants were fluent in isiZulu and English was their second language. Interviews were then far lengthier in an attempt to document the correct information relayed. The lack of recent similar scholarly literature which could depict trends, comparisons and correlations within a five year period was a limitation as was the small sample size due to funding constraints. Therefore, a discussion of this nature was excluded from this study.

The experiences and perceptions of Black African female street vendors

The data collated and presented in this section depicts and describes the experiences, challenges and concerns that these informal food traders had at the time of the interviews. The Black African female study participants are a representative of the racial and gender preponderance street vendors in Durban.

All interviewees indicated that they had made job applications within varying sectors in Durban, but without success. Three interviewees indicated that they became street food traders out of necessity: 'This seemed the best way to earn money after completing my studies, I could not

find a job, so I am still doing this'.

These interviewees had completed their Bachelor degrees at university and were unsuccessful at a number of graduate job applications. An additional three interviewees did not complete their secondary schooling education. Street food trading then became a preferred choice of livelihood for those women because they had no other option. Four interviewees did not have the resources to attain a tertiary educational qualification, despite completing secondary school successfully.

Challenges: A Lack of facilities and resources

Informal traders explained that they experience a wide variety of difficulties whilst trading during the day. The most concerning has been the lack of basic amenities such as shelter, running water and toilets within the city centre. The majority of traders that have permits and pay their monthly dues still trade without basic necessities such as shelter, often for many years. The amendment of The Business Act of 1991 which deregulated barriers to informal trading contributed to the unhindered growth of street trading in South Africa. Since this growth there has been a strain on resources such as water, sewage systems and sanitations (Mukhola, 2015). An interviewee said:

It is very difficult, whilst I'm working I need to go and ask the shopkeepers to use the toilets and many of them say No. They don't like it and there are very few public toilets that we can use.

Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner (2013) indicated in their study that Durban's informal street traders have poor access to basic amenities in comparison to cities like Accra, Ahmedabad and Lima. They also identified that the lack of basic amenities can hinder vendor business as street traders then have no choice but to trade for fewer hours during the day and find it difficult to work under adverse climatic conditions.

Interviewees indicated that if their stalls were equipped with shelter, water and electricity they would expand their range of foods prepared for sale to consumers and possibly spend more hours at their allocated vendor. Some were confident that they would be supported extensively by their regular daily consumers, should they supply them with a bigger variety of food items. Rainy days are often then the cause of a loss of income due to goods being ruined and becoming inedible. These street traders are not compensated for their losses.

One interviewee indicated that she filled a bottle of water daily at her home to bring with her to the city. Often this amount of water is insufficient as sometimes customers want to wash up after they have eaten, and she is then forced to use this water. She also made mention of the fact that she then asks nearby shopkeepers to refill her water for her and as an alternative she buys a small bottle.

Mukhola (2015) explains that foods prepared on street sites without running water and hand washing facilities can become easily contaminated due to poor hygiene practices. Rane (2011 cited in Mukhola, 2015: 310) states that the 'condition under which some vendors work is unsuitable for the preparation and selling of food for public consumption'. This is also a serious concern for local authorities.

None of the street food traders interviewed had access to electricity whilst trading their food items, and are forced to use their domestic kitchens. This is why many street food traders are seen in the city centres grilling foods such as corn on the cob, and a variety of meats on an

open fire or a portable gas cooker. Trolley barbeques to cook meats and mealies have also become popular amongst food vendors and hawkers. Wardrop (2006) explains that the twenty-five litre capacity tin usually used to store oil and other items have become ideal vessels to hold coal for barbeques. Interviewees explain that they have been forced to improvise on the streets for decades and that their request for electricity via trade union organisations have gone unanswered.

Ten of the 12 street food traders interviewed indicated their appreciation for the flexible work hours that vending allows. The views collated describe the daily routines of these women. These routines were inclusive of child rearing, preparing food for sale, preparing meals for their families, purchasing ingredients required for the preparation of foods for sale and for home consumption and commuting their children to and from school. One food hawker described the demands of her workday and explained that on some days the workload feels overwhelming. She explained:

Some days it's really hard, especially when it rains, and I am not someone that manages well when I get wet. The stress is around my food going bad from the rain. I have those food covers, but still every time you open and close the container, my muffins get wet. But we do what we have to do. I have children.

Central to their personal lives was that the majority of these women had minimal or no support from male partners within their households. Interviewees believe that the reason for this is the patriarchal values that are dominant in African households. Five South African interviewees share similar experiences with the three Zimbabwean interviewees in this regard. For a example South African interviewee said: 'My husband believes that cooking and food buying is a woman's job. So he refuses to help at home'.

Another South African interviewee explained, 'My man thinks that if he pays some of the bills, it is enough, he is older than me too and doesn't think it is his responsibility to help'. Often other family members residing in their households assisted these women with the preparation of the foods for retail. Key responsibilities include purchasing fresh ingredients, preparation and cooking. These tasks were managed primarily by the interviewees themselves. Teenage children and other female family members would assist on an ad hoc basis. A Zimbabwean food vendor explained:

I came to South Africa because I was tired of living without my husband in Mbare, Zimbabwe. So when I came he told me that I must work for myself and he will work for himself. Our son is in Zimbabwe.

Chingono (2012) explains that the patriarchal control of resources within many African households encourage women to become financially productive so that they can cater for things not deemed as important or necessary by their husbands. In many patriarchal societies, there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities determined by finance, culture and other social pressures that contribute towards the continuity of gender inequality.

Income generation

Half of the respondents indicated that they were the primary breadwinners in their homes and the income earned from food vending on a daily basis provided food, amenities and necessities, such as water, electricity and schooling expenses for themselves and their

families.

The five food hawkers and food vendors that sold hot meals on a daily basis indicated that their daily income from sales ranged approximately 17 to 36 US Dollars. One food hawker said, 'a few years ago 500 Rands (32 US Dollars) was good money and we could manage well, now things are so expensive. I am spending much more on food and transport'. One food vendor indicated that some days she earned just under 20 US Dollars and this amounted to 120 US Dollars per week, and accumulated to 480 US Dollars per month. However, the income of a street trader is largely unpredictable and can vary from one week to another. The capacity to meet their personal sale targets becomes difficult especially because they are competing against a number of small eateries, tea canteens and restaurants around the city and other street food vendors who also retail the same food items. Prices of food items have to be competitive.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown regulations, street vendors were denied the right to trade. South Africans adhered to the level five lockdown regulations during March 2020 which meant that only essential service employees were allowed to be at work during that time. Street vendors were permitted to trade in April 2020 but feared minimal sales as less people were commuting to the city centre (Mgqibi, 2020).

Studies that focus on income generation and profit margins of street traders in South Africa discuss varying hindrances to successful street trading and document varied statistics. Burger & Fourie (2019) explain that the lack of skills and initial capital to start trading in the informal sector can be one of many obstacles that South African employees experience.

Burger & Fourie (2019) stipulated that a small insufficient amount of money intended for an initial business investment can hinder immediate profitability and be a barrier to street traders wanting to increase their stock for sale. As a result profitability can remain low and cannot easily increase without bigger financial investment. Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, (2013) indicate in their study findings that the average street vendor earned approximately R3000.00 (330 US Dollars) per month, but it was also reported that male vendors earn almost double the amount of their female counterparts.

Crime

The majority of interviewees indicated that they have been victims of petty theft at their stalls. This is often the case when streets are overcrowded with people and small groups of criminals steal from them. Municipal stalls comprise of one open table and that this structure cannot deter thieves from stealing their goods. One interviewee explained:

on some days we manage to replace the stock and other days we go home without an income and count our losses. To repurchase food ingredients or other food items for resale I have had to borrow money from people I know.

Other trading requisites such as paraffin stoves are placed in boxes so that they are not visible by thieves. Interviewees say that 'it is difficult to hide your food that you have for sale'.

Harassment

Respondents explained their daily challenging encounters both with the city's thugs and persons of authority within the city. As female traders they are forced to give predominantly male municipal officials, South African police officers and individuals who have labelled

themselves as 'street trader's union leaders' free food as often as twice or thrice a week. One interviewee said 'they demand food without paying when we cannot pay fines immediately'. These women believe that because of gender and ethnicity, they are being exploited in this manner. In addition, if they are defiant they are threatened with violence and those trading without a permit blackmailed for contravening regulations. These behaviour patterns are exercised by mostly male perpetrators and a handful of female policepersons. Indeed, 'police harassment of vendors was reported to be pervasive' by Mkhize et al (2013:) and one in two street vendors are continually being harrassed by members of the South African Police Services.

Interviewees have witnessed other traders harassment too and the confiscation of their goods. This is affirmed by other studies which highlight that the confiscation of property and permits by South African police officers is a problem. Foods taken by policepersons are consumed and shared amongst themselves (Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner, 2013). Gamielien & van Niekerk (2017) state that the continual conflict with authorities experienced by street traders can escalate to harrasment, threats of violence and the confiscation of goods.

Many recall their personal experiences in relation to being fined for trading without a permit. EThekweni Municipality's Informal Trade Management Board (ITMB) was responsible for issuing trading permits and traders were often expected to pay bribes. This organisation was perceived to be corrupt by many street traders in Durban. The organisation was formed with an aim to become a platform to share and discuss the grievances of street traders, but became a vehicle for the municipality to communicate their instructions, excluding street traders views in policy development (Çelik, 2011). The board has exclusively represented the rights of vendors with permits in Durban since the year 2004 and was accused of corrupt practices since 2007. Street traders have been paying for site allocations, despite the sites being declared free by EThekweni Municipality (Tolsi, 2007). Interviewees indicated that they are still paying for site allocations, despite grievances expressed with unions, policepersons and municipal officers. One interviewee said, 'Every time I get a fine, it is a different price and then I have to agree to give the officer at least three or four free meals in a week. Sometimes this can go on for a whole month'.

The perception of the majority of interviewees is that there are no regulations that all stakeholders abide by, and their experiences are characterised by nepotism, irregularities, unfairness and harassment. National, provincial and local governments, vendor organisations and non-governmental organisations alike are seen as unhelpful and disinterested by the study participants. South African police officers walk the streets and engage with the street food traders, but municipal officials and other government persons of authority are rarely seen. This finding is shared by Mkhize, Dube, & Skinner's (2013) research that found the only interaction that street traders had with local government was through 'harrasment and fines'.

Vendor organisations and non-governmental organisations

Two vendor organisations were brought to the fore during these interviews. Masibambisane Traders Association (MATO), that has a membership of almost 2500 people despite only operating for three years, and the South African Informal Workers Association (SAIWA), which is a 'trade union' organisation well known by street traders. However, interviewees expressed their weariness and distrust of these organisations because their pleas for their assistance to end harassment were repeatedly ignored. The overall perception by street vendors of both government and social movements were negative because of perceptions of corruption and favouritism.

These interviews highlight street vendors' lack of adequate knowledge about their rights, the

law and organising potential. Literature which focuses on street vendors in Durban mention at least 11 organisations (non-governmental organisations and trade unions). Examples include The Eye Traders Association, Siyagunda Association and Phoenix Plaza Traders` Association, The Sisonke Trader’s Alliance and The South African Informal Workers Association (Çelik, 2011). The majority of interviewees had minimal knowledge of organised associations that may be able to address and manage street trader grievances efficiently and successfully.

Table 2: Perceptions of respondents towards traders unions and NGO’s

Responses	Number of street food traders
Vaguely aware of the role of the informal traders’ unions	3
Unaware of the role of the informal traders’ unions	8
Aware of the number of unions, movements or non-governmental organisations that exist	0
Believe that these organisations can assist	0
Do not believe that these organisations can protect them from harassment	12
Have a perception that these organisations are male dominated	7
Have a perception that prejudices based on ethnicities and nationalities prevail in these organisations	6
Have a perception that these organisations only serve South Africans	7
Believe membership of these movements are a threat to successful street trading	7

The responses collated are indicative of the perception of the limited value that these organisations can bring to the livelihoods of these street food traders. All 12 respondents stated their belief that these organisations cannot assist them in warding off individuals that harass them regularly. This belief is affirmed by Mitullah (2003) who explains that due to the informal nature of street traders’ activities, their representative trader associations are weak when it comes to collective advocacy (Mitullah, 2003 cited in Akuoko, Kwadwo, & Forkuo, 2013). Global trends indicate that only a few street traders become members of formalised associations aim to address their grievances. For instance, 90 % of Ghana’s street food traders do not belong to any trade association (Nicolo & Bendech, 2012).

Despite the above findings, ‘trader associations are useful in fighting for the rights of members, enabling access to resources, representing members on important issues, influencing policy, and creating external links’ (Lund and Skinner, 1999 cited in Kofi et al, 2013: 30). Participatory democratic public associations can engage in creating forums through which communication between government, citizens, stakeholders, interest groups and businesses are facilitated to address a particular concern or decision (Chetty and Owusu-Ampomah, 2018).

There are numerous benefits that street food traders or any other group of marginalised people may gain from becoming members of organisations with a clear intent to function democratically and improve their conditions (Chetty and Owusu-Ampomah, 2018). Possible benefits include having access to a collective voice for securing licenses and permits as well as for negotiating with city authorities over rules, policies, penalties and regulations. These

associations may have more bargaining power to leverage collectively with public authorities than individual traders (Cohen et al., 2000 cited in in Akuoko et al, 2013: 30).

Historically in Durban, the development of public participatory initiatives such as the formation of Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU) which was established in 1994 and the Informal Traders Management Board (ITMB), which was launched in 1995 earned the support of traders. Both these organisations were responsible for substantial changes that benefitted street traders. In December 1994, the SEWU had reached an agreement with the Durban City Council to install water supplies and temporary toilet facilities for the street traders in the Warwick Junction¹ area (Skinner, 2008). Benit-Gbaffou (2016) explained that whilst there is evidence of South African street trader organisations lobbying for the interests of street traders, negotiation processes between organisation representatives and municipal regulators of the informal economy are difficult.

Direct communication between ordinary people and governmental organisations can be considered as mechanism for addressing the grievances of street traders. Continuous, frequent and transparent communication between street trader organisations and relevant government organisations can effectively modify the traditional top-down approach of communication to one that is democratic and valued by citizens. Mantzaris (2018) explains the relevance of public participatory initiatives for successful and equitable social cooperation and coordination amongst social, economic and political diverse communities. This contrasts with the norm of large hierarchical organisations that use a prolonged communication process. Transparency is viewed as a key factor in successful cooperation and coordination of organisations with varying degrees of power:

For real public participation to become a reality, transparency in government is of paramount importance as communities can only participate actively only when they are well informed on functions, actions, inactions, priorities and challenges facing public entities and institutions. (Mantzaris, 2018: 129)

Study participants opted not to not join trade associations. This decision was based on their negative understanding of the roles that these associations can play as well as the overall perspective that these large organisations lack the capacity to address grievances that can be seen as minor in comparison to other struggles. Interviewees indicated a preference to liaise directly with municipal authorities and relevant stakeholders to address their grievances, but also lacked the procedural knowledge and communication skills to challenge decisions:

Conclusion

As black African entrepreneurs of various nationalities residing in Durban and trading in the streets of the city centre, their daily routines are fraught with essential livelihood responsibilities. These women have opted to become street food traders because of the time flexibility that this type of employment offers them and the earning capacity it provides. Despite challenges, these women are financially independent and do support their families. For these women, street food vending is not a choice but a necessity to survive. Their inability to secure jobs in the formal economy that cannot absorb school and university graduates have impelled people towards self-employment in the informal economy. There was also a lack of partner or spousal support in many of their households in relation to their daily tasks and preparation

of foods to retail because of dominant patriarchal beliefs and practices in their households.

In developing countries around the globe it is common for poor women to work as street traders, and are often employed as hawkers for informal traders. Their contributions are significant to the national economy of their home countries, and they contribute towards the general well-being of numerous urban residents (Cohen et al, 2000 cited in Akuoko, 2013: 27). Despite their contributions, these women experience high levels of personal insecurity on a daily basis. In most developing countries globally, 'harassment from city authorities and the confiscation and destruction of goods and wares of women street traders and hawkers is a common occurrence' (Akuoko et al, 2013: 29).

In this study the challenges facing female street traders, their motivations to be employed in the formal economy and their perceptions of the roles of trade organisations in Durban are highlighted. The informal traders lacked relevant information and knowledge that can assist them to communicate with local authorities. Their experiences of harassment have been downplayed by those that harass them and by themselves as a coping mechanism for survival on the streets. Their lack of engagement with social movements was based on their belief that their grievances are not important and that these organisations lack the capacity to effectively assist them primarily because they are black females and not necessarily from South Africa, essentially reflecting both social exclusion and economic marginalization.

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