



Coping Strategies and Income of Food Vendors within Bus Stands in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper analyses food vendors' coping strategies to the encountered socio-economic challenges and the consequent income. This is crucial for understanding their economic resilience, informing supportive policies, enhancing livelihoods, and contributing to sustainable urban development and poverty alleviation. Through a cross-sectional study design, qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 160 respondents. Food vendors were selected randomly, while ensuring an appropriate proportion of women and men and diversity of the traded products. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, whereby, descriptive and inferential statistics were determined. It was found that most food vendors offset economic stress by reducing rations (90%) and or opting for lower-quality ingredients (89%). Hitherto, the majority (68%) earn below the poverty line of Tshs. 7140. Multinomial regression revealed that the 'size of capital' and 'food prices' were positively statistically significant ($p=.000$) in predicting the increase in income. It was concluded that the opted coping strategies do not enhance the income of food vendors but the size of capital. Hence, the paper recommends that the respective local government authorities should endeavour to enhance the entrepreneurial and business capacity of food vendors, focusing on increasing access to: rational and stable capital and quality raw materials at meaningful cost to raise their income.

Introduction

Food vending plays a vital socio-economic role by creating livelihoods and providing nourishment to low- and middle-income earners, thus contributing to human development. In Dar es Salaam, it is estimated that between 10,000 and 14,000 food vendors (FVs) operate, with over 80% being women aged 20 to 45, many of whom support dependants and employ between 3 and 6 individuals (Marrs, 2018; Maroble & Sabai, 2016). Approximately 71% of vendors allocate their income to household needs, including food, rent, and school fees (Karondo, 2020).

FV serves urban workers, students, and commuters, with 80% of schoolchildren and university students relying on vended meals. Demand is driven by urbanisation, an 88% increase in women's formal employment, and the affordability of vended food (Marrs, 2018). However, vendors face infrastructure shortages, unstable regulations, a lack of access to credit, and various business constraints (George, 2021). Daily earnings range from TZS 5,000 to 20,000, with many earning below the poverty line (Marrs, 2018).



Sulle et al. (2021) recommend relief measures; however, little is known about vendors' coping strategies. This paper examines their responses to socio-economic stress and its impact on their income, providing insights for policies and programmes aimed at enhancing their livelihoods.

Literature Review

This review examines the coping strategies employed by food vendors (FVs) to address socio-economic challenges. Using Lazarus and Folkman's (1980) framework, it defines these coping strategies and investigates informal food vending, income dynamics, and stress-coping theory. It highlights both approach and avoidance coping and their impact on vendors' income. The review further discusses adaptations to challenges such as COVID-19 and urban evictions, underscoring the necessity for research on coping strategies and income for policy development.

Coping strategies (CS)

Lazarus (1993) defines coping as individuals' efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1980, p. 223), coping involves cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, tolerate, or diminish external and internal demands. This study adopts their definition and views coping strategies as behaviours of food vendors (FV) in addressing business-related socio-economic challenges.

Food vendors

Mathaulula et al. (2016) define food vending as a small-scale business that sells ready-to-eat food, either at home or on the streets. Imathiu (2017) includes cooked meals, fresh ingredients, snacks, and drinks in this category. The National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI, 2004) characterises food vending as individuals providing food without a permanent structure, using temporary or mobile setups. They may operate in open spaces, temporary shelters, or move between locations. In light of the aforementioned definitions, this paper considers all vendors of cooked food operating in open spaces and temporary shelters, as well as at selected bus stands and nearby street sides. Moreover, the study includes vendors who sell ready-to-eat food while on the move, whether on foot or using various modes of transport.

Income

Income refers to money earned from goods, services, or investments before deductions (IMF, 2022). Among informal FV in sub-Saharan Africa income is typically measured as net revenue after deducting operational costs (FAO, 2024; AGRF, 2023). This study focuses on vendors' daily net revenue, which varies according to market demand, seasonality, and economic conditions.

Theory of stress and coping strategies

Roth and Cohen (1986) classify coping strategies into approach and avoidance coping. Approach coping includes problem-solving, seeking support, and maintaining prices while adjusting quality. Avoidance coping involves denial, withdrawal, or shutting down the business. Generally, higher levels of approach coping yield better outcomes; however, this study assumes that both strategies significantly impact vendors' income.

Food vendor's coping strategies to socio-economic challenges

Food vendors utilise various coping strategies, particularly during crises such as COVID-19 and urban evictions. RePOA (2024) found that vendors navigated socio-economic impacts by adhering to health protocols and adjusting their operations. Some reduced business hours, cut staff, or modified their products. Others resorted to digital platforms, although this was challenging due to evictions (Hassan & Lwoga, 2024).

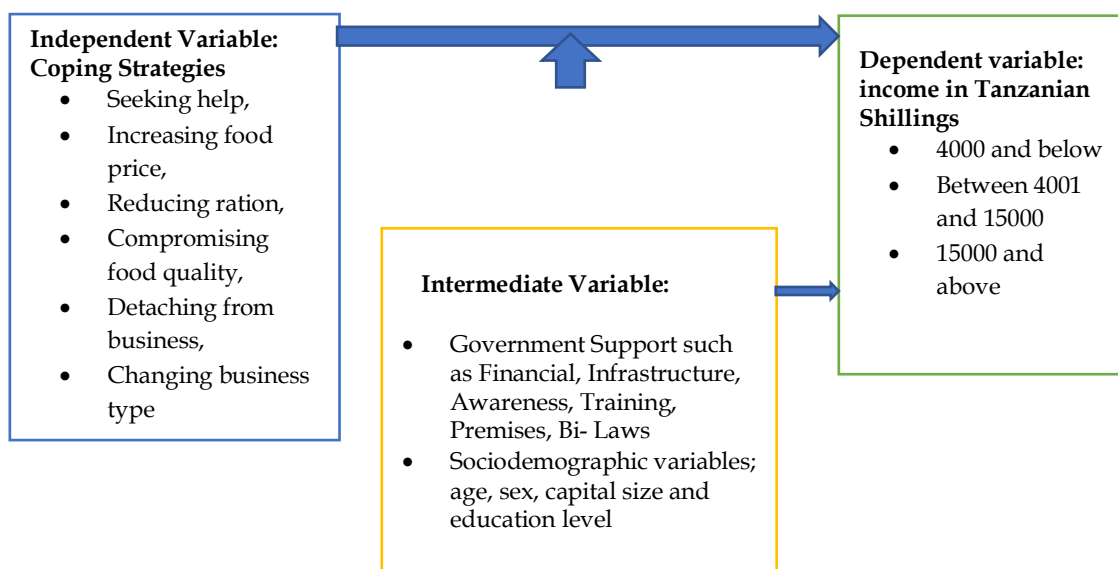
Tan and Lee (2024) observed vendors in Kuala Lumpur utilising digital tools, innovative menus, and financial strategies to sustain their businesses. These studies highlight the resilience of FV.

However, limited research examines the direct connection between coping strategies and income, knowledge that is essential for policies aimed at enhancing vendors' livelihoods.

Conceptual framework for analysing coping strategies (CS) and income

This study examines how CS influence the income of food vendors. CS are categorised into avoidance and approach strategies. Avoidance involves detachment from or alteration of the business, while approach strategies involve implementing guidelines, increasing prices, utilising technology, seeking assistance, reducing portions, or compromising quality through cheaper materials. These strategies can have both positive and negative impacts on income. Income serves as the dependent variable, whereas CS, the independent variables, are influenced by socio-demographic factors such as age, capital size, and education level.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Analysing CS and Income



Source: Conceptualised by the researcher referring to the revised theory and empirical literature.

Method

Study area

Dar es Salaam was chosen deliberately for its distinctive features, including its bustling and congested local bus stands. These draw large numbers of people from the city, surrounding regions, and neighbouring countries who appreciate the vended foods. It is also the largest and fastest-growing city (Marras, 2018). According to NBS (2021) projections, Dar es Salaam boasted the highest population, at 5,401,801 in 2020, compared to other regions in the country.

Study's Design

A cross-sectional study was conducted to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from 160 food vendors across four bus stands. In-depth interviews using semi-structured questionnaires were carried out with 40 vendors at each stand to explore their experiences and income. Municipal officials, particularly community development officers, were also interviewed to assess government support for food vendors. A sample size of 160 respondents was adequate to minimise sampling error at a 0.05 confidence level (Pallant, 2010). This study design was chosen due to limited funding and a six-month timeframe while ensuring data quality (Kothari & Gaurav, 2019). It allows for data collection at a single point in time and estimates the prevalence of the outcome, in this case, income, from the entire population (Kothari & Gaurav, 2019).



Sampling procedure

A multistage sampling procedure was utilised to select the most congested bus stands: Kigamboni Ferry, Kinondoni Makumbusho, Ubungo Mbezi, and Gongolamboto, based on heightened vendor activity (NBS, 2021). A sample size of 40 respondents per stand minimised sampling error, consistent with the recommendations of Bailey (1998) and Kimia (2008), who advocate for a minimum of 30 cases for statistical analysis. Kothari and Gaurav (2019) likewise support the reduction of sampling error through an increased sample size.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data, addressing the limitations associated with each approach (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Quantitative data on income, demographics, and capital were gathered through structured questionnaires. At the same time, qualitative insights into vendors' working conditions were obtained from in-depth interviews with two participants at each bus stand.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics of FV's demographics and daily income were generated using SPSS and are presented in a table. Multinomial logistic regression was utilised to assess the impact of CS and socio-demographic factors on income. Pallant (2010) and Field (2013) indicate that this model is ideal for predicting categorical outcomes with multiple categories, along with a mix of continuous and nominal predictors, as seen in this study. The model is displayed below:

$$P(y) = e^{\alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \dots}$$

$$\beta_k x_k \quad (Agesti and Finlay, 2009).$$

Where: $P(y)$ = income of the food vendor, e = the natural logarithm, α = the equation's intercept, β_1 to β_k = coefficients of the predictor variables, and x_1 - x_k = predictor variables displayed in Figure 1.

Before conducting logistic regression, the data were examined for outliers and multicollinearity; hence, two predictors with a score of less than 10 were excluded from the model.

Results

This section summarises the study's findings on food vendors at bus stands in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It analyses respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, coping strategies for economic challenges, and the impact on income levels. Key variables include gender, age, business premises, income categories, capital size, and cost-saving strategies. Statistical methods, such as multinomial logistic regression, assess the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms, providing recommendations to improve vendors' economic stability.

Characteristics of Respondents

The sample represented FV around bus stands in Dar es Salaam (Field, 2013). The majority of respondents (71%) were female, and 68% were under 39, indicating they were part of the economically active population. These socio-demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 1. Huang et al. (2019) note that many economically active individuals drive economic growth. Concomitantly, policies that promote economically active workers, such as the studied sample, can help mitigate the adverse effects of an ageing population on national development. The study also found that 94% of vendors lacked permanent premises and preferred to operate at bus stations for convenient access to customers. This aligns with Vain (2021), who defines marketing as identifying customers and considering the convenience of their location. The findings highlight the need to enhance the accessibility and suitability of these premises for food vendors.



Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

S/N	Character	Count n = 160	Percent
1.	Respondents' District		
	Dar es Salaam City Council	40	25
	Ubungo Municipal Council	40	25
	Kinondoni Municipal Council	40	25
	Kigamboni Municipal Council	40	25
2.	Respondents' Sex		
	Female	114	71.2
	Male	46	28.8
3.	Respondents' age-groups		
	33 years and below	59	36.9
	34 - 38	49	30.6
	39 and above	52	32.5
4.	Number of schooling years		
	7 years and below	151	94.4
	8 years and above	9	5.6
5.	Condition of Business Premise		
	Stationed	10	6
	Temporary/Mobile/ Standby	150	94

Source: Field Data computation adopted from the main research report

The Identified Coping Strategies

The study revealed that FV relied on two primary cost-saving strategies: reducing portion sizes and using less expensive ingredients to maintain stable prices despite fluctuating costs, thereby ensuring they retained middle- and low-income customers (Marras, 2018). The specific low-cost ingredients varied according to the type of dish being prepared. For instance, FV reused cooking oil for fried dishes, whereas those selling rice or ugali opted for cheaper rice and tomatoes, referred to as 'masala' in Swahili.

These practices pose health risks, increasing the potential for diseases and elevating national healthcare costs. According to WHO (2022), unsafe food can harbour harmful substances, heightening the risk of illnesses such as diarrhoea and cancer, ultimately jeopardising the sustainability of customer flow. Table 2 outlines these coping mechanisms. In addition to compromising food quality, using low-grade materials contributes to malnutrition and disease, particularly among vulnerable populations. This underscores the need for interventions to enhance FV's working conditions, knowledge, access to raw materials, and capital. As Marras (2018) observes, FV serves an economically active group essential for national growth (Huang et al., 2019). Many vendors also rely on borrowing raw materials, often struggling to escape debt. A vendor from Gongolamboto bus station shared:

I don't have any capital; I borrow raw materials and often fail to make enough profit to escape the borrowing cycle.

Table 2: Types of the Opted CS - Multiple Response

S/N	Strategy	YES		NO	
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1	Borrowing raw materials	66	41.2	94	58.8
2.	Over diluting detergents	48	30	112	70
3.	Raising prices	00	00	160	100
4.	Opting cheap raw materials	143	89.4	17	10.6
5.	Reducing ration	144	90	16	10

Source: Analysis of Field Data

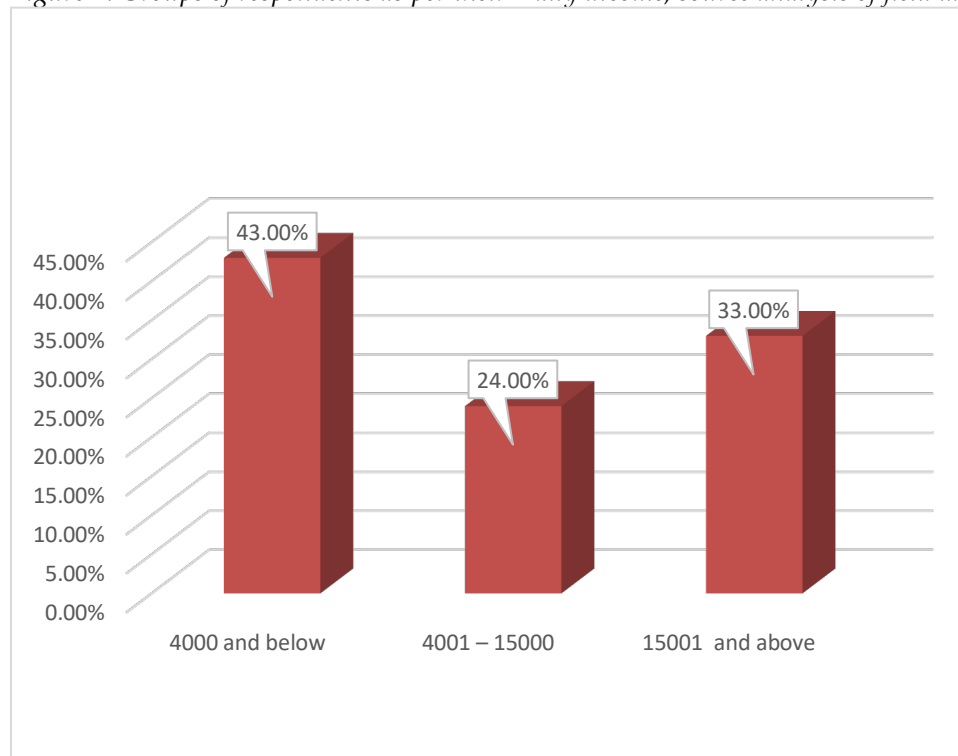


Income level of Food Vendors

Figure 2 illustrates the daily income distribution of surveyed FV. The data indicates that 43% earned Tshs 4,000 or less per day, equivalent to 1.7 US dollars or below, falling under the extreme poverty threshold of 1.90 US dollars per person (Faria, 2022; World Bank, 2016). Relating data to the international poverty line, 67% of vendors earn below the poverty threshold. Considering that 48% of Tanzania's population are dependants, including 43.9% children and 3.9% elderly (TNBS, 2012), it is assumed that each vendor supports at least one dependant. This implies that, their daily income sustains two individuals, with per capita daily income ranging from Tshs 2,000 (US\$ 0.9) to Tshs 7,500 (US\$ 3.2). This is well below the international extreme poverty line of US\$ 1.90 (Faria, 2022; World Bank, 2016). The finding suggests that two-thirds of vendors live in poverty and reinforces Tanzania's classification in 2022 among African nations with a high proportion of the global poor (Saleh, 2022).

Furthermore, Faria (2022) noted that 4% of the world's extremely poor population resides in Tanzania. Sulle et al. (2021) attributed the decline in FV's earnings during the COVID-19 pandemic to disruptions in the food service market. They recommended direct support for vendors, with this study underscoring the necessity for government policies and human development initiatives to enhance vendors' economic stability.

Figure 2: Groups of respondents as per their Daily income; source analysis of field data



Influence of CS and Social demographic Characteristics on Income

Multinomial logistic regression was used to test whether independent variables and socio-demographic traits influenced FV' income:

H0: The odds of earning above the poverty line are the same for vendors using different CS across socio-demographic features.



The data were examined to ensure that the observations were independent and that there were no issues with multicollinearity or outliers, following the statistics (2018). The variables "selling online" and "inflating food prices" were excluded due to minimal relevance, thereby avoiding potential issues with model convergence (Pallant, 2010). The dependent variable was categorised into three groups based on daily earnings in Tanzanian Shillings: (1) 4000 and below, (2) 4001 - 15000, and (3) 51001 and above. The results of the multinomial logistic regression are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

The Pearson Chi-square statistic was not significant ($p = .379$), indicating a good model fit, as a significant result ($p = .05$) would suggest a poor fit (Statistics, 2018). The model accounted for 42% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in the likelihood of earning 15000 Tanzanian Shillings and above.

Table 3: Results of Logistic Regression on the Ability of the Model to Fit the Data

Model Fitness				
	Model Criteria	Fitting Likelihood Ratio Tests		
Model	-2 Log Likelihood.	Chi-Square.	df	Sig.
Intercept Only	194.813			
Final	163.210	31.602	14	.005
Goodness-of-Fit				
	Chi-Square	df		Sig
Pearson	146.574	142		.379
Deviance	155.808	142		.202

Source: Field data analysis

The findings in Table 4 contradict the initial hypothesis, indicating that 'capital size' and 'reduction of portions' significantly affected the likelihood of vendors earning 15000 Tanzanian Shillings and above ($p < .05$).

The 'capital size' variable was highly significant ($p = .000$) in predicting variations in income. A positive B coefficient indicates that a one unit increase in capital leads to higher income. This suggests that enhancing vendors' financial resources may be more effective in boosting earnings than other predictors. Vendors with at least 500,000 Tanzanian Shillings in capital could rent stable premises, thereby minimising displacement and financial losses due to evictions. Previous research, such as that conducted by Mead and Liedholm (1998), illustrates that higher capital correlates with business longevity, increased income, and stability. Similarly, Ssendi and Anderson (2009) found that limited capital hinders informal vendors in Tanzania by preventing the establishment of permanent premises and heightening the risk of evictions.

The lack of secure locations poses a common challenge for informal vendors worldwide. Roever and Skinner (2016) noted that inadequate legal protection and space allocation lead to evictions and financial instability. This study reinforces the idea that improved financial resources allow vendors to secure stable premises, thus ensuring a consistent income.

The study also found that the 'reduction of portions' significantly ($p = .000$) influenced the likelihood of vendors earning below 15001 Tanzania Shillings. The negative B coefficient indicates that reducing portions may worsen financial hardship. Vendors reported that although cutting portions might lower costs, it risks alienating customers. This aligns with Ochieng et al. (2019), who found that portion reductions can deter low-income customers in Kenya. Saha (2011) noted that while cost-cutting strategies, such as reducing portions or using cheaper ingredients, can help



vendors cope with financial pressures, they may jeopardise food quality and customer satisfaction, ultimately undermining long-term viability.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of capital size for income stability and the risks linked to short-term solutions such as reducing portions. They emphasise the need for policies that improve financial access and cultivate secure business environments to support sustainable livelihoods in the informal sector.

Table 4: Results of Logistic Regression on Coping Strategies, Socio-demographic Characteristics and Income

Parameter Estimates

Income	B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
≥4000 Vs 4001-15000	Intercept	19.287	2.843	46.038	1	.000		
	Age	.001	.004	.078	1	.780	1.001	.993 1.009
	Years in school	-.189	.271	.489	1	.484	.828	.487 1.406
	Capital	.000	.000	3.056	1	.010	1.000	1.000 1.000
	Reduce ration	-17.323	.907	364.792	1	.000	2.997E8	5.067E-9 1.773E-7
	Sex	-1.459	.804	3.289	1	.070	.233	.048 1.125
	Organised	-.125	1.237	.010	1	.919	.882	.078 9.960
	Cheaper materials	1.654	1.201	1.897	1	.168	5.230	.497 55.079
>15001 Vs 4000-15000	Intercept	18.956	3.612	27.546	1	.000		
	Age	.001	.004	.071	1	.790	1.001	.993 1.009
	Years in school	-.240	.383	.392	1	.531	.787	.372 1.666
	Capital	.000	.000	2.451	1	.117	1.000	1.000 1.000
	Reduce ration	-17.116	.000	.	1	.001	1.356E-8	1.356E-8 1.356E-8
	Sex	-1.327	.881	2.266	1	.132	.265	.047 1.493
	Organised	2.319	1.762	1.734	1	.188	10.169	.322 321.174
	Cheaper materials	.175	1.054	.028	1	.868	1.192	.151 9.403

Source: Output of logistic regression using field data

Discussion

This section provides a thorough analysis of the study findings regarding FV's CS and their influence on income levels. The results are assessed in relation to existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and practical implications. This discussion examines FV's socio-demographic characteristics, the types of CS utilised, and their impact on income levels.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Food Vendors

The study revealed that most (71%) of the food vendors in the sampled bus stations were female. This finding aligns with previous studies (Marobhe & Sabai, 2016), which indicated that women



dominate the informal food vending sector due to limited formal employment opportunities. Furthermore, the majority of food vendors (68%) were under 39, suggesting that economically active individuals primarily engage in food vending. This supports Huang et al. (2019), who asserted that an active working-age population contributes to economic resilience.

In addition, the study revealed that 94% of FVs did not have permanent business premises. This precarious situation compels vendors to operate in open spaces, rendering them vulnerable to eviction and economic instability. Roever and Skinner (2016) underscored similar concerns, contending that a lack of secure vending spaces leads to frequent disruptions and income loss.

CS of Food Vendors

The study identified several strategies employed by food vendors to alleviate socio-economic challenges. The most common strategies included reducing food portions (90%) and opting for less expensive raw materials (89.4%). These findings align with research by Rijal (2018), which noted that street vendors often compromise product quality to remain competitive. However, such practices pose serious health risks, as emphasised by the WHO (2022), which warns against consuming unsafe food that may contain harmful bacteria or chemicals.

Another significant coping mechanism was the borrowing of raw materials, adopted by 41.2% of vendors. While this approach helps vendors sustain their businesses in the short term, it perpetuates a cycle of debt that hinders long-term growth. One respondent emphasised the difficulty of relying on credit, noting that profits were insufficient to break free from the borrowing cycle.

Interestingly, none of the respondents indicated that raising food prices was a coping strategy. This suggests that FVs are highly responsive to market demand and consumer affordability, opting instead to keep prices lower to attract customers. This finding supports Marras (2018), who argued that FVs primarily cater to middle and low-income earners, rendering price increases an unfeasible option.

Influence of CS on Income

The study's findings indicated that 67% of FV earned below the poverty threshold of Tshs 7,164 per day, categorising them as experiencing extreme poverty (World Bank, 2016). The multinomial logistic regression analysis revealed that, among the various CS, only two variables significantly influenced income levels: capital size and portion reduction.

Capital Size and Income

The analysis demonstrated that the size of capital had a statistically significant positive impact on income ($p=0.000$). This finding aligns with Mead and Liedholm (1998), who established that access to sufficient startup capital enhances business performance and stability. Vendors with greater capital were better positioned to secure permanent premises and invest in high-quality raw materials, thus increasing customer retention and profitability.

Reduction of Portions and Income

Conversely, reducing food portions had a statistically significant negative effect on income ($p=0.000$). Vendors who implemented this approach experienced customer attrition, which resulted in decreased earnings. This finding corroborates the research by Ochieng et al. (2019), which indicated that portion reduction deters repeat customers, particularly among low-income consumers reliant on vendors for affordable meals.

Implications of the Findings

The findings emphasise the vulnerability of food vendors operating in informal settings. The extensive use of cash substitutes, which undermines food quality and nutrition, raises concerns regarding public health and business sustainability. Furthermore, the significant role of capital in



enhancing income suggests that interventions aimed at increasing access to financial resources could bolster vendors' economic stability.

The study also emphasises the significance of secure business environments. Vendors lacking stable premises encounter frequent disruptions, which diminish their capacity to generate consistent income. Roeber and Skinner (2016) underscored that governments ought to implement supportive policies, such as designating specific vending areas, to assist in mitigating these challenges.

Conclusion

The discussion confirms that while FV employ various CS to manage economic challenges, not all strategies positively impact income growth. Capital size plays a critical role in enhancing business stability, while reducing portion sizes adversely affects income. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, development organisations, and financial institutions aiming to improve the livelihoods of informal FV in urban settings.

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