



Black women's lived experiences of informal street trading in East London, South Africa

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Abstract: The study sought to evaluate women's lived experiences of informal street trading in East London with specific reference to the coping strategies they adopt and their challenges within the industry. A qualitative method was used, adopting a case study design. Interviews were conducted with fourteen street trader women participants who were purposefully selected because of the artefacts they displayed for sale. Data collected through semi-structured interviews were thematically analysed. The results revealed that the harsh street-trading environment forced the women traders to adopt some coping strategies, for example, using the history behind the artefacts they were selling in order to encourage customers to buy, customer care, always displaying a smile to their customers, and bargaining with the customer. The study also emerged from the study that the women were experiencing challenges with their trade, including competition, bad weather, price drops, and high transport costs. The study contributes to an improved understanding of the life realities faced by black rural women informal street traders in East London.

Keywords: South Africa, Black Women, Informal Street Trading, Lived Experiences, Gender

1. Introduction

Until 1994, the apartheid government in South Africa excluded most citizens from genuine and equal participation based on their racial affiliation and gender. Regarding the issue of gender inequality, the new South African government introduced several legislative procedures to protect women's rights. These legislative procedures include, but are not limited to, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000); the Employment Equity Act (1998); the Domestic Violence Act (1998); South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equity (2002); and the Gender Policy Framework for Local Government (n.d.-a). The focus of these policies is on women's empowerment, which involves addressing gender inequality issues that exclude and disadvantage women. Despite the existence of these policies, women in South Africa are still discriminated against, especially in the job market. Omarjee (2018) and Sinden (2017) argue that certain positions, such as top and senior management posts, have been reserved for men, while women are only offered positions at the lower levels of the organization, such as secretarial or administrative jobs. To exacerbate this unfair labor practice, Obworcha (2006) states that women dominate the less profitable food and beverages subsector, whereas males have a near-monopoly in more profitable manufacturing enterprises such as the production of household metal goods and furniture. This is a clear indication that females are discriminated against based on their gender, and as such, men have more job opportunities than females in the formal sector.

StatsSA (2018) reveals that the unemployment rate among women in South Africa was 29.5% in the second quarter of 2018 compared to 25.3% among men. It is against this background that the majority of women have no space in the formal sector, and they tend to swell the ranks of workers in the informal economy (Wills, 2009). Similarly, In On Africa (2013) declares that a severe shortage of new job opportunities in South Africa has led women who have been unable to enter the formal job market to look at street trading to generate income. The informal sector has been characterized by unskilled labour, little job security, no fringe benefits, small-scale operations, easy accessibility, and the absence of access to institutional credit or other support and protection. All these characteristics have drawn the attention of researchers to establi-

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sh how women survive in this hostile environment (Magidimisha & Gordon, 2013; Moyo & Deen-Swarray, 2013; Shava, 2018; Sassen, Galvaan & Duncan, 2018) In this line of thought, Essop and Yu (2008) note that given the large size of the informal sector in relation to the formal sector, it is imperative to understand the dynamics and trends within the former. The literature reveals that research has been conducted on the challenges women face in the informal sector and the strategies they adopt to cope with the challenges in that sector (Sassen et al., 2018; Mabilo 2018). To the best of our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on the experiences of women street traders in East London. A recent study conducted by Wegerif (2024) focused on the contribution of street traders to food security, with a specific focus on the experiences of fresh produce traders. This study did not focus on the experiences of women but was general to both men and women. Therefore, a study focusing on women's coping strategies to overcome the challenges they face in the informal industry is significant. Consequently, the purpose of this paper was to explore women's lived experiences of informal street trading in East London. Specifically, the paper sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

- What challenges do informal street traders face in East London?
- What coping strategies do informal street traders in East London adopt?

1.1. Theoretical framework

The study was grounded in Feminist theory, which, according to Crossman (2009), is one of the main contemporary sociological theories that examine how men and women are treated in society, with the goal of improving the lives of women. Villaverde (2008) states that feminist theory aims to comprehend women's lives in order to address their subjugated status in society and help transform the gender regimes that are currently in place. Feminist theory is primarily concerned with giving a voice to women and highlighting the various ways in which they have contributed to society. This theory was deemed relevant for the current study, as it sought to explore the lived experiences of informal women street traders. It is likely to shed light on the contribution of women to the national economy. Moreover, the theory allows informal women street traders to voice the challenges they face in their efforts to join the working class within a male-dominated society. Bulawka, Molek and Wozniak (2023) maintain that accommodating such forms of interaction is crucial to understanding culturally driven behaviours.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The informal sector in South Africa

Tshuma and Jari (2013) indicate that the informal sector is characterized by income not recorded in the formal national economy. According to Dewar (2005, p. 5), informal trading is viewed by some as representing backwardness in the development of a nation, while others view it as presenting opportunities for all-inclusive urban development. However, according to Quantec Research (2011), the contribution of the informal sector to the economy is significant, as more than 2.2 million people were employed in the informal sector in 2010. Willemse (2011) points out that while the government and researchers' attitudes towards the informal sector in South Africa have changed positively over the last few years, the sector is still overwhelmed by a number of challenges. Hence, the rationale for this study was to investigate the lived experiences of women who trade in the informal sector to understand the benefits of street trading at the individual level. Although income may be limited, studies conducted by Kusakabe (2010) and Sagnia (2007) in central and west Africa indicate that cultural trade functions as a poverty reduction and survival strategy or even a coping strategy for the poor. Kusakabe (2010) points out that the income accrued is used for subsistence, to supplement other sources of family income, and to expand the business. Subsequently, Onyenechere (2009) lamented the fact that informal female traders are often excluded from maximally benefiting from their trade, as training opportunities and decision-making structures leave them in the cold. Similarly, Posel (2001) and Meyiwa (2012) have highlighted the issue of the marginalization of women within South Africa in the economic production of the country.

South Africa faces key and urgent developmental challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, all mentioned in most of the literature cited in this study. These challenges, also known as deprivation elements, affect the lives of women more negatively in various and varied ways. Scholars who measure elements of deprivation affecting human development maintain that the reason why women's social inequality persists is due to their position in society, determined by their access to resources and opportunities (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Willemse (2011) submits that this position of women in society is one of the main reasons behind informal street trading in South Africa. The informal sector, like many sectors in South African society, is characterized by a division of men and women's participation. Although women tend to dominate trading with smaller artefacts, men dominate trading with bigger items that carry more value (Blunch, Canagarajah, & Raju, 2001). Hippard (2012, p. 13) submits that divisions of labour according to gender and gender inequality, in general, determine the success or lack thereof of craft-oriented projects. Like domestic work, craft remains of little value (Hippard, 2012). According to Almamari (2015), the link between craft and gender (especially women) has received much coverage in both anthropology and social sciences literature. For example, Berns (1993) has evaluated the role of women in social and cultural meaning-making through craft. Alila and Pedersen (2001), cited in Almamari (2015), have also examined the link between gender and craft in South Africa, using Eldoret as a case

study. On the matter of gender in craft enterprises, Hannan (2001) is of the view that gender mainstreaming is a determinant of effective development. She further argues that, in the same way, gender roles and their unequal structures are socially constructed, they can be socially deconstructed. It is for this reason, amongst others, that the International Labour Organization (2008) points out the growing need to be gender-sensitive in employment creation, directly related to local productivity and enhanced demand for goods and services.

According to Tshuma and Jari (2013), the informal sector also has a ripple effect on reducing poverty in many households by creating multiple sources of income for the poor, who usually also have little to no education and therefore lack skills. To maximize these benefits, some studies say that it is crucial to promote these activities in the informal sector by eliminating restrictions and restricting restrictions to open avenues of income that poor urban households can use to escape poverty (Ndabeni, 2014); Tshuma & Jari, 2013 Tshuma and Jari (2013) further observe that the argument for the sector's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) comes from the fact that informal street trading grows at a rapid rate and gives the unskilled and illiterate a chance to earn an income, without the red tape often experienced in the formal business sector. They further point out that what has led to the rapid growth of the informal sector everywhere is that the money required to start-up is relatively little and many people can afford it without seeking assistance from anyone, especially not formal institutions like banks. According to Kromberg (2005), small businesses in South Africa are estimated to contribute about 30% to the GDP, which might be much less than what they actually contribute. How much they actually contribute is not known due to the non-registration of these businesses, which has made it difficult for accurate projections. Tshuma and Jari (2013) add that any economy, developed and developing alike, needs the informal sector. According to Tshuma and Jari (2013), the informal sector contributes to regional and local development and is a key driver for value-added exports. Moreover, Ndabeni (2014) affirms that an improved understanding of the nature, workings, and potential contribution of the informal sector is critical to ensuring inclusivity in economic development.

2.2. Women and Craft Industry in South Africa

Economically, women's empowerment is central to achieving sustainable development (Government of India Planning Commission, 2006; National Development Plan, 2030; Meyiwa, 2012). Subsequently, there is an increase in programs that place women at the center of development, focusing on women's projects like crafts (Liberata, 2012). Consistent with the significance of this drive, Wills (2009) points out that the transformation of women's economic, social, and political fortunes is heavily dependent on government support for craft businesses. Hutchens (2010) argues that men have more advantages than women in economic activities, especially those activities that require the businessperson to be away from home, as women tend to have other responsibilities at home. Drawing from a study entitled 'South Africa's informal economy', Wills (2009) posits that craft is a survival strategy for many poor women in the developing world.

Pandey (n.d.-b) argues that women's contribution to the national economy remains undervalued. Furthermore, he argues that a significant portion of the efforts of the informal sector remains unknown. The craft industry is one of the most accessible to most South Africans in informal economic activities. As with the investigations based on this study, research has shown that in South Africa, and many parts of the world, women dominate the crafts sector (Hippard, 2012; Ndabeni, 2014). According to Muller et al., (2011), with the flexibility of entry requirements, the informal sector has allowed women to dominate therein. They further argue that women entrepreneurs, especially Black women, have limited access to capital, technology, and resources. Therefore, craft activity often seems their only real opportunity for income generation. Furthermore, with poor education and only survival skills, there are few entry points into the economy for people to earn an income.

2.3. Challenges of informal street trading in South Africa

Despite the fact that women represent a critical component in alleviating poverty and promoting BEE, there are numerous challenges facing the female entrepreneur in South Africa. Tshuma and Jari (2013) identified some of the challenges facing informal street businesses. They assert that informal businesses are facing many constraints mainly because they do not have assistance from the government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. In their findings, Tshuma and Jari (2013) identified several internal and external barriers to the success of the informal sector. Specifically, amongst the internal factors, they identified financial, legal, and organizational constraints. Amongst the external factors, they highlighted trade restrictions, marketing, and distribution as being the most common denominators. In addition, Willemse (2011) identifies four common constraints faced by informal street traders as economic pressures, sociocultural challenges, adverse political conditions and policies, and operational challenges. Among the economic barriers identified, Willemse (2011) mentions the lack of access to formal credit from banks. With regard to sociocultural constraints, Willemse (2011) identifies gender-specific barriers experienced by women in informal street trading, and concerning political conditions and policies, mention is made of the absence of appropriate policies and vital infrastructure such as good access, efficient and affordable public transport, and accommodation. As far as operational challenges are concerned, Willemse (2011) points out that street traders are inundated with permit fees to operate in demarcated areas. He also mentions that suppliers have power over informal traders by not providing discounts because street traders purchase products in small quantities.

Willemse (2011) further observes that street-trading depends heavily on the number of customers served per day and the amounts each customer spends per visit. Competition between informal traders is also considered a problem. They serve a limited number of customers per day, thereby increasing the competition among themselves, thus decreasing the overall consumer demand, and forcing informal traders to lower prices in order to attract customers. Willemse (2011) also mentions the lack of storage facilities and climate change, especially when there is too much rain, as some of the major hurdles for the sector.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research approach

The study was qualitative in nature. According to Hammarberg, Kirkman, and Lacey (2016), qualitative methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participants. This method was deemed relevant for the current study since the focus is on the lived experiences of women who sell products on the streets.

3.2. Research strategy

The study followed a case study design. According to Crabtree and Miller (1999), one of the advantages of a case study is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, enabling participants to tell their stories. Additionally, Lather (1992) states that through these stories, participants are able to describe their views of reality, which allows the researcher to better understand the actions of the participants. The case study was deemed relevant for the current study since it focused on the experiences of women who are street traders. The researchers relied on the stories narrated by these women about their daily experiences regarding their street-trading along the Eastern Beach in East London.

3.3. Research Method

Individual face-to-face interviews of 40-50 minutes each were conducted in isiXhosa, which is the mother tongue of the participants. The authors formulated questions based on the research questions already mentioned in the Introduction and posed them to the participants as a guide for interviews held between May and August 2018. To add to these data, in January-February 2024, the authors revisited the site for triangulation and sourcing current data. All women we spoke to in 2018 confirmed our previous findings. They emphasized the issue of heavy rains that the country received in 2023 as a barrier. This confirms the 2018 weather data on the barrier. The researchers interviewed the participants at their trade stands along the sea, where they normally exhibit their work to the locals and tourists. Participants allowed the researchers to record the interviews and to use excerpts from the transcripts to disseminate the study findings.

3.4. Setting of research

Based on the focus of the study, Eastern Beach in East London was used as a setting for data collection. This setting was relevant because it provided an interconnection between the investigated problem and the setting. Selling items on the beach is a common practice in a South African context, as sellers have the opportunity to expose their products to tourists who normally visit South African beaches.

3.5. Establishing and establishing research roles

The researchers introduced themselves and explained the purpose of the study. Upon explanation, the female traders voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The authors assured the participants that the data collected would be used only for the purposes of the study. Since two of the researchers were female, the interviewees were made to feel at ease and communicate openly without feeling intimidated.

3.6. Research Participants and Sampling Methods

As mentioned above, the study participants were black female traders who sell cultural artifacts along East Beach in East London. Fourteen (14) participants were selected purposefully because of the artifacts they displayed for sale. The number of respondents was determined by the number of black street traders who were available at that site daily. These women create and sell pieces of craft using their inherent creativity and traditional knowledge passed down from generation to generation. This handmade craft is unique to the African continent.

3.7. Data recording

The general purpose of data recording is to set in writing and ensure the preservation of the data collected in the course of field or laboratory studies. In the study, the collected data were appropriate to the study objectives and were stored on password-protected computers accessible only to researchers. The recorded data were complemented with the field notes.

3.8. Data analysis

The researchers read the data several times to get familiar with it. The interviews were transcribed, and labels were assigned to sections of data using words or short phrases taken from the section of data. This process generated inductive codes that were grouped together. Recurring themes were identified.

4. Results

This section analyses the work of women and presents their perceptual voices and experiences.

4.1. Coping strategies adopted by street traders.

4.1.1. Knowledge of the history behind the item

The findings of this study revealed that women street traders had to know the history behind the items they were selling. To this end, the participants indicated that the items and artefacts they sold told the story of the people of their respective communities. The participants revealed that foreign buyers showed more interest in the stories behind the items. In other words, knowing the history or story behind an item was a strong motivation to sell the item. One participant, pointing to a wooden piece of an African woman carrying a pot, mentioned the following:

'This piece of wood reflects how people lived in the past. In the past, women used to walk long distances to fetch water from wells and rivers for domestic use. During that period, it was imperative that the dress code of the women did not cover the whole body deliberately to avoid attire that would be too heavy for them, as they would travel long distances with a pot of water on their heads. Sadly, in contemporary times, women's clothing is used to accuse them of exposing themselves to sexual harassment'.

Pointing to another piece of wood that represented an old warrior, the same participant mentioned that Africans in the past used to fight wars, whether local or with the colonialists. She also mentioned that the warrior represented one of the people who fought for their freedom. She went on to explain that the spear the warrior was carrying represented the technology of the time, and this was the only tool that was used then. The participant also pointed to another wooden product that she called 'Fisherman'. She explained that the piece told a story about how people in African communities used to make a living.

Another participant, on the same topic, claimed that some of the items sold reflected the African continent with its important trees and animals that are indigenous and held in high regard within the continent. She added that in order to reflect on the flora and fauna, producers used specific types of wood such as ebony and mahogany. Both types of wood have a very smooth finish when polished, making them valuable as ornamental wood. Pointing to the animal artwork, the participant said:

'Animals reflect the African culture as they have different roles to play within respective communities. In the past, animals used to represent a connection with people since most of them served as totems for certain families'.

Yet another participant, who is specialising in beadwork, mentioned that the material she sold reflected the different tribes and the traditional functions that African people participated in. She pointed out that the beadwork has different colors and that, in some cases, there were different colors for males and females. She said:

"In most cases, the colors are determined by the function or ceremony that one will attend. For example, if one attends a ceremony where young men are welcomed back from the mountain (traditional circumcision), one will need to wear colors different from when one is attending the initiation of traditional doctors (izangoma or amagqirha). Also important is that customers play an important role in the final product, as they always add their voices in choosing the design and colours that they eventually prefer to purchase '.

Consequently, this participant averred that the product should be relevant to the demands of the market. Besides the obvious reason for their trade, i.e., to sustain their families, many women indicated that they were able to withstand street-trade challenges due to the knowledge of values and beliefs attached to their craft.

On the same question, another participant said:

'When foreign people buy an item, a seller must explain to the buyer what the item means, including the history behind the item. Tourists are more interested in knowing which tribe uses particular items and for what purposes. Failure to provide an explanation behind the craft is likely to make one lose customers because foreigners expect the seller to provide the story '.

The participant further explained that tourists informed the sellers that when they presented people with gifts back home, they also wanted to tell them what the items symbolize. To illustrate the point, the participant made an example of a shield. She said:

'As sellers, we have to explain to the tourist how a shield is used by the Zulu people and how the white beadwork is used when people like amaXhosa perform certain rituals for their ancestors or any function that involves amagqirha (traditional healers). Sometimes, foreigners even take our pictures by collecting enough evidence about each artefact purchased'.

4.1.2. Adjusting the price

The participants indicated that they increased the price for white and foreign customers. In contrast, they protected black customers by reducing the price they could afford. This was a coping strategy to increase sales. One participant mentioned:

'Since I rely on these daily earnings, sometimes I have to reduce the price for black people to get them to buy trusting that they should afford.' On the other hand, I usually increase my price for white customers, especially those who seem like foreign tourists.'

She justified her action by stating that she wanted foreigners to value her culture. She further stated that she believed that her culture must be expensive for foreigners so that they do not look down on Africans. She argued that raising the price for foreigners was a strong message to them that Africans are talented and anyone from outside should pay a premium price for the products.

Responding to the same question, another participant mentioned that when a customer did not have enough money, she always gave them time to go and withdraw money so that they could pay the full amount. She explained that the idea of giving them the item was to make sure that when the customer brought the money, it went straight to her. She argued that she used that strategy because there were many people who sold items similar to hers. Therefore, if she did not commit customers by giving them the items, when they return with the money, they would not spend time looking for her because they would be free to buy from anyone else. She claimed to have been using this strategy for a long time and had never experienced a situation where the customer did not return.

Responding to the same question, a participant indicated: *'The strategy I use is to play with the mind of the customer. For example, if the item costs R50.00, I would label R80.00. I know the behaviour of customers very well, especially the Chinese; they are always keen to negotiate the price down. Then, I will bring the price down to, say, R55.00, giving the customer a sense of getting the item at a perceived bargain price while, as a seller, I still know that I get more than the original price set for the item'*.

4.1.3. Customer care

The participants indicated that customer care was an important survival strategy that they adopted. They indicated that the important thing in business was not to neglect a customer. A participant explained:

"When customers come to my stand, I always smile and offer to help them. A customer came to my stand three times without buying anything. When the customer came for the fourth time, she indicated that she had been shopping around and realized that I was the only one who cared about customers".

This excerpt reveals that customers buy from someone whose attitude is positive. It means that the availability of the item is not enough, but it should be accompanied by the manner in which the customer is treated.

4.2. Challenges encountered by street traders

As far as challenges are concerned, many participants mentioned that the weather conditions posed a serious problem to them. Since they did not have formal infrastructure, they found it difficult to sell their products during rainy days. They also mentioned transportation of their items as a problem since they commuted with their items using public transport on a daily basis. Regarding this issue, one participant stated:

'In the Eastern Cape, we have experienced a wet winter in 2018 when it would sometimes rain for a couple of days nonstop. If the weather is bad, we cannot display our products, since we do not have shelters to protect ourselves and our products'.

On this very matter, another participant pointed out that there were many people in the same area who were selling similar items, and therefore competition was a challenge. To cope with the competition, the participant stated:

'Sometimes I move around and check how much my competitors charge for a particular item. Having this information would help me reduce the price a bit so that customers buy from me.'

Another participant indicated that she once had to pay a lot of money to transport the goods she was selling. An additional challenge to which the participant pointed out is that sometimes customers submit orders and fail to return and pay. She narrated a story of one Chief from another village who brought many women to submit the colors they needed for beadwork for a special function they were going to have. The participant mentioned that she spent three nights working on the order, but the Chief and his entourage did not show up to collect.

Responding to the same question, a participant argued that men sometimes were at an advantage because men themselves made the majority of items made of wood. Therefore, they make more profit than women on such items. Another participant mentioned:

"In this business, men are more advantaged. The fact that as a self-employed woman, I cannot afford to pay a childminder. Therefore, I have to bring my baby to work, which brings attendant challenges such as crying baby resulting in customers going to stalls owned by men, considered less irritating". In addition, she indicated that the previous month she had spent about two weeks without coming to her stand because her baby was sick.

Responding to the same question, another participant argued that men were lucky naturally because at home they were not involved in daily domestic chores such as cooking. She mentioned that it was difficult to save money because every day she had to ensure that her children had eaten before they went to bed. She also noted that men do not spend money every day on household chores. Instead, men have the opportunity to save money. Another

reality she pointed out was that it has become socially naturalised that when the children are hungry, they look at their mother and not at their father. Consequently, she further thought that men had more control over their money than women did.

5. Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women in informal street trading in East London, with specific reference to the coping strategies they used and the challenges they faced within the industry. The results of the study revealed that women who trade informally on the streets of East London used a variety of survival strategies. It is important to note how these women intertwined their values and beliefs with their craft. In other words, the history of these women was embedded in the products they sold. As part of history, the products sold reflected the different tribes as well as the traditional functions in which African people engaged. In this regard, one may conclude that these women not only sold the products but also their culture and history. Women's reliance on survival strategies has been acknowledged by Sassen, Galvaan, and Duncan (2018), who observed that women took the lead on ownership and control of their lives as street traders and used opportunities for survival, economic gain, and personal development provided by street trading. This finding is also in line with feminist theory, whereby the labor of women should be valued and acknowledged.

It also emerged from the study that these women were experiencing challenges in relation to their trade. For example, participants had a problem with competition as they were selling similar products in the same place. This finding supports the results of a study conducted by Willemse (2011), which revealed that competition between informal traders was considered a problem. This was because street traders serve a limited number of customers per day, which increases competition among themselves and forces them to lower their prices to attract customers. Another strategy is that women decided to lower their prices for certain racial groups to make goods affordable to them. This 'half a loaf is better than no bread' approach was one of the coping strategies women adopted to survive. On the other hand, women increased prices for white customers, especially foreigners. While on the face of it, this might appear exploitative, it needs pointing out that the value of the rand versus foreign currencies has been such that even the Tourism industry has determined different prices for local and foreign tourists. Failure to recognize this difference would render local tourism dead due to unfavorable foreign exchange rates. Accordingly, it is interesting that, despite their limited education and knowledge of foreign exchange imperatives, informal street traders still find a way to factor in such differences.

The challenges surrounding street traders in this study have been established by previous research. For example, Tshuma and Jari (2013) noted that all businesses engaged in informal trading in Alice, where their study was conducted, faced a number of constraints. These constraints included few customers, low profits, proximity to markets, too many competitors, storage problems, and delivery problems. These findings are also confirmed in a study conducted by Sassen, Galvaan, and Duncan (2018). Their findings revealed that street traders faced tough conditions, such as evading law enforcement and avoiding fines or having their goods confiscated. In another similar study, Mago (2018) observed that the main challenges facing street traders were competition, crime, inadequate infrastructure, and financial constraints.

In terms of the position of being a woman in the industry, respondents felt that being a woman in the informal sector had more disadvantages than being a man. Having to raise children in a paternal community always gives more responsibility to women than to men. This finding is consistent with the study by Moyo and Deen-Swarray (2013), which revealed that women faced structural restrictions that limited the choices they made in the formal and informal sectors. This finding is in line with feminist theory as the gap between male and female is exposed. This gap should be used as a basis for understanding the lives of women to remedy gender imbalances and equal access to resources and opportunities. The fact that women street traders left the informal sector confirms the results of previous studies on gender studies. For example, Nakray (2024) observed that men's work is remunerated by wages and work-related provisions, such as pensions, a provident fund, or paid sick leave. In contrast, women do not have the same entitlements, which is the root cause of income inequalities between women and men.

6. Conclusions

This article has focused on the lived experiences of women trading on Eastern Beach in East London. It has revealed that female street traders had to adopt survival strategies due to the harsh environment in which they operated. Survival strategies were necessary to sustain their businesses. Coping strategies include knowledge of the history of the products they sold, adjusting prices, and customer care. It also emerged from the study that these women were experiencing challenges such as competition, high transport costs, and adverse weather conditions.

When considering the practical implications of this study, it is important to acknowledge some inherent limitations of the study design. The sample was limited to only fourteen female street traders who were trading along the Eastern Beach, and the participants were further limited to those women who sell craft productions. Future research should focus on the experiences of street traders, regardless of their gender. Additionally, it is important to conduct research on a larger sample of participants who could be available in different areas of East London, such as the CBD and Mdantsane Highway Taxi Rank. However, while this study provides a description

of a small sample size of respondents, it offers insight into the challenges and triumphs faced by the female street traders who participated in this study.

7. Practical implications

The fact that these street traders occupy public space along the coast is a clear indication of their plight of poverty. Since they are not catered to by government and municipality policies, they have to fend for themselves in order to make a living for themselves and their families. The authors recommend that the government or municipality build formal structures along the beach for the street traders. This would save them the transportation costs they pay every day to transport their products. Having those formal structures would also mean that bad weather is no longer a barrier to their business. The researchers are aware of the program initiated by the Buffalo City Municipality to equip hawkers with business knowledge to build their capacity for street trading. Although this is a good initiative, the researchers recommend that it be rolled out faster so that it benefits all those who are street traders.

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