

The study "Adaptation of informal workers in Bangkok Metropolitan Region: A year after the COVID-2019 pandemic"

Abstract: The study "Adaptation of informal workers in Bangkok Metropolitan Region: A year after the COVID-2019 pandemic" features a case study of street vendors from 2020 to 2021, two years after the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangkok. This research examines workers' practices in adapting to the pandemic situation. Factors for coping, livelihood and career recovery, and access to policies and help provided by relevant agencies are included. Furthermore, this analysis offers a policy recommendation to promote Bangkok Street vendors' adaptation and recovery of livelihood and businesses. This study combined documentary research from related literature and survey research. The researchers reviewed associated studies, collected questionnaires from 430 street vendors, and conducted focus group discussions with 15 representatives of street vendors, scholars, state agencies, and nongovernmental organizations.

The findings reveal that most street vendors, precisely 73.49 percent, are female and approximately 49 years old. Most 41% had primary education, but 18.8% had undergraduate degrees. The average number of family members per family is 3.70, with approximately 2.58 children and 2.39 elders (above 60). On average, these street vendors have been residents in Bangkok for 19.5 years, with 64 percent having house registration certificates. Most of the vendors (46.96 percent) are responsible for expenses for rental contracts and 24.57 percent for housing mortgages.

Regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, during the latest wave of the outbreak, an increasing number of vendors and their family members have tested for COVID-19, undertaken home isolation, and received treatment. This has increased expenses related to testing procedures and the quarantine period. Consequently, their business opportunities have diminished while their family burdens have increased. Moreover, the study found that the outbreak has created more unemployment within the family for family members usually engaged in both formal and informal employment.

Regarding the impact on their business, some vendors have had to change their goods, change jobs, or move to sell at other markets or locations. Sometimes, vendors extended the number of sites they set up shops and reduced the number of employees or hours worked. In the process, they reported losing more than half of their income. The prominent issues that affect their business are the restrictions on travel and transport, transportation costs, night-time curfews, compulsory market and shop closures, and the decreasing number of customers. The significant impacts on the street vendors in Bangkok are the fear of COVID infections, the limited access to

means of prevention and treatment, the financial burden of expenses and debt, and stress and relationship challenges in the family.

To adapt to the situation, most street vendors have had to rely on savings, extended hours of working, taking more significant risks in business, reducing consumption and economizing, pawning possessions, postponing debt payments, and selling property. However, the government sector has attempted to assist informal workers through support measures and projects. Street vendors have benefited from these projects, specifically the "Tung-Ngern" (Money Bag) application to receive payments from subsidy grants. However, some street vendors worry about retroactive tax collection, and some do not have cell phone access to the internet or cannot register for the application (in time). Several vendors do not understand how the application works.

In conclusion, researchers recommend that the relevant sectors use strategies to lessen the impacts and restore street vendors' livelihoods and business opportunities in Bangkok. The government should support them by allocating a permanent working place through participation at the local level. The related organizations should also provide budgeting for low-interest loans, prepare social welfare support for daily living expenses, and businesses for vendors and their families. Thus, the researchers recommend the promotion of the participatory governance of government and local administration offices and stakeholders in developing the informal business sector to enhance the workers' quality of life, income, and business opportunities.