




## Informal Street Vendors Survival Strategies during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Received : January 26, 2023

Revised : May 1, 2023

Accepted : May 10, 2023

Online : July 31, 2023

### Abstract

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our government has been forced to implement strict quarantine measures. As a result, social interaction, particularly among informal street vendors, has been restricted. The researchers undertook this study to learn more about the survival methods used by informal street vendors of Tuguegarao City, Cagayan. The current study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as a qualitative research design. The informants in this study were 15 informal street vendors who were chosen through a random sampling technique. The data was gathered using an interview schedule. Two major findings were extracted from this study: (1) the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are primarily negative to informal street vending businesses. In contrast, informal street vendors suffered from a decline in sales, inconvenience in selling, increased operating expenses, and disruption in operations. (2) Due to the resilience of the informants, they are able to cope-up by employing survival strategies such as adaptation of business strategies, policy adherence, and optimism. The results of the study will provide insights to the local government on how to possibly intervene in the affairs of the informal street vendors in order to contribute to the city's local development as they are part of the economy.

**Keywords** Covid-19, Informal Street Vendors, Survival Strategies

### INTRODUCTION

It is the month of October 2020 when drastic changes have come to intervene in our normal routine, which is known due to the existence of Covid-19, a virus strain that spread across the world and is said to freeze the activities and economy of every country. Thus, the pandemic affects the livelihoods of every individual, which leads to the emergence of other social problems. In this time of the pandemic, vulnerable segments of the community are most strained, especially the Informal Sector, such as informal street vendors (Resnick et al., 2020; ILO, 2020; Rogan and Skinner, 2020, as cited in Megersa, 2020).

Informal street vending portrays the trading activities of informal entities occupying public spaces in search of customers. They are quite visible in the city, such as in the town square and in downtown, and they typically sell on the streets, sidewalks and at the edges of stores (Yustika, 2000, as cited in Widjajanti, 2016). An ever-changing environment is an inevitable demand in our society. Hence, informal street vending runs as a way of life for some sectors of the population because it provides an economic lifeline and a means of survival, particularly in low-income and poorer communities. Informal street vendors provide essential products and services in different places where customers rely on them for basic needs or instant access and convenient distance. Due to the health restrictions and safety protocols, informal street vendors have no other choice but to temporarily close their businesses affecting their livelihoods, preventing them from operating and struggling for survival. About the study of Minten et al. (2020), changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have multi-dimensionally affected the business and life of food vendors resulting in income reduction, starvation, and an increase in other conflicting factors. At

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such a statement, it had visibly indicated how instantly informal street vendors' activities differed even before COVID-19 existed. The study of Gaterak et al. (2020) primarily introduces that informal street vendors aggressively come up with responses addressing the current situation, which are to 'just accept' and 'keep fighting' as spoken. Other literature has furthermore supported specific strategies whereby informal street vendors have adopted. 'Working hard' is yet emphasized in the study of Handoyo and Setiawan (2018) as a primary survival strategy, wherein in informal street vendors' case, not working would mean not surviving.

Constructing a strategy for survival is a favourable sense of coping mechanism for some unfortunate circumstances and an efficient way that would greatly contribute to keeping the business running. The present situation has been undeniably challenging in most cases. Currently, some informal street vendors continue to operate as minimal; strict health and safety restrictions are lifted. However, informal street vendors are far adjusted, and there is still an essential need for a proper approach and action to manage the situation. To effectively address the changes and sustain their means of living, there is the need for additional guidance and supporting data that would educate and contemplate the current situation of Informal Street Vendors. Thus, the need for this study is taken. Since there are few studies conducted yet on the premise of COVID-19 in consideration to informal street vendors, this study aims to provide new knowledge and insights into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal street vending business and their survival strategies. Also, this study aims to explore the effects of the pandemic on informal street vendors may be useful to the local government for policy recommendations on managing this sector in the economy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework of this study is linked to the survival strategies of informal street vendors. The presumption that survival strategies employed by informal street vendors may vary guides this study. The presumption is anchored on the fact that informal street vendors face challenges that may no longer be relevant, implying their current survival strategies. As stated by some studies, the use of social networking sites, observe and practice social norms, win and keep social trust, payment of 'arkabala', avoidance of public authorities, the sale of essential products, market timing, productively use of operating hours, offer new and fresh product, cost-based pricing strategy, and sales promotion are imperative survival strategies used by informal street vendors that are potentially relevant to the present changes on their trading activities with the existence of COVID-19 (Amoah-Mensah, 2016; Forkuor et al., 2017; Gama et al., 2018; Rosales, 2013; Matenga, 2018; Molai, 2019; Saha, 2011; Mramba et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2016; Walsh, 2010; Musoni, 2010; Kawarazuka et al., 2018; Gora, 2020).

### **Clusters of Informal Street Vendors**

According to Kesumasari (2020), informal street vendors are traders in our economy who do business in an informal scheme making use of public facilities. However, people misunderstood informal street vendors as small enterprises in some instances. Although they all have the same nature, they can be classified into many sectors of street vending. Their distinguishing factors are their physical setting and the product or services they offer. These factors help people determine who the informal street vendors are and what type of informal street vendors they are.

Location and Appearance contribute to the conclusion of which informal street vendors are; thus, their setting is a good reference. Informal street vendors' physical settings can be classified into two groups which are the informal street vendors who sell at one place (immovable) and informal street vendors who sell roaming around places (movable). Immovable includes street

vending stalls that can be either semi-permanent stalls or permanent stalls. Semi-permanent stalls are informal street vendors' stalls that use wood, plywood, zinc, and asbestos as their wall and roof boundary attached to public establishments and are usually open in the daytime. Also, permanent stalls are modified informal street vendors' stalls that are not attached to any establishment and are located in vacant spaces between sidewalks and fences of infrastructures that are designed in rows with the same dimension; there is a space arrangement between the seller's area and customer's area (Kesumasari, 2020). As for the other group of informal street vendors, movable street vending includes carts that are divided into two, namely unmodified carts and modified carts. Unmodified carts are those found on sidewalks in public open spaces like park and stadiums, which usually requires vendors to push or exploit force to serve their purpose, and modified carts are those that are combined with motorcycle or bicycle, allowing vendors to move conveniently and find more customers (Kesumasari, 2020). Furthermore, some works of literature did not mention walking informal street vendors, which is a common type of street vending. Walking informal street vendors are regularly selling across the street, moving from one place to another, carrying their products under the sun.

Various studies confirmed how informal street vendors greatly contribute to the informal economy through their products and services offered in an affordable and accessible manner. There are three identifying elements in accordance with products and services offered by informal street vendors, which are food, non-food, and services. Food is a substantial element for consummation and is classified as raw, cooked, or prepared food. Non-consumable goods will serve as non-food, like household utensils, leather-made items, electronic goods, etc. Lastly, services serve as the extension of skills and knowledge offered by informal street vendors (Saha, 2011; Kesumasari, 2020). These elements are one-way concepts to determine informal street vendors.

### **Survival Strategies of Informal Street Vendors**

The informal street vendors are currently facing a lot of problems because of COVID-19, and making their business run despite these problems is essential. To make it happen, informal street vendors have done a lot of survival strategies just to sustain their livelihoods. According to the study of Handoyo and Setiawan (2018), for some informal street vendors, being an informal street vendor is the only option and the most attainable way to sustain their life and survive every day. Informal street vendors are employing survival strategies that they formulated or adapted to earn their living.

Amoah-Mensah (2016) identifies ten strategies that informal street vendors adopted. These are networking, market timing, undifferentiated market strategy, the sale of essential products, offering new and fresh products, productive use of operating hours, cost-based pricing strategy, trade credit, and sales promotion. These strategies are also mentioned in the study of Walsh (2020), Gora (2020), and Kawarazuka et al. (2018) and are used by informal street vendors to gain a competitive advantage in the market. In the study of Handoyo and Setiawan (2018), as a survival strategy, informal street vendors use public spaces and crowded public spaces such as sidewalks, office areas, hospitals, and traditional markets. They operate in such places where there are many potential customers. Having no alternative, informal street vendors are just giving bribes or portions of their daily income to the authorities as one of their survival strategies. This has become the practice of some informal street vendors who want to operate their business just to survive in the market. Informal street vendors also survive for a short term by spending their days in running battles to avoid the authorities (Matenga, 2018; Molai, 2019; Saha, 2011; Fokuor et al., 2017; McKay et al., 2016; Walsh, 2010; Musoni, 2010; Amoah-Mensah, 2016).

To survive, informal street vendors start operating their business early, and they also trade at night. They are using outdoor media, carts, and banners just to attract buyers. Some of them tried

to use Facebook as a campaign but found it unhelpful because the results were not reliable. Informal street vendors use social capital like social norms, social networks, and trust as their survival strategy (Forkuor et al., 2017; Gama et al., 2018; Mramba et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2016; Walsh, 2010).

However, the study of Rosales's (2013) informal street vendors' survival strategies includes the reliance on kinship and paisano networks which provide safety nets. Street-patrols alerts, alliance building, maintenance of personal, professional, and symbolic hygiene decrease the negative impact for every informal street vendor and also increase their income. Informal street vendors employ risk-averse strategies to decrease their vulnerabilities to avoid depending on or leaning on social networks. But, these strategies are forcing informal street vendors to choose between income generation with risk and low income with low risk. According to a study by Golden and Powell (as cited in Amoah-Mensah, 2016), adapting to different situations and the environment as a whole enables informal street vendors to survive and serve their customers in a better way.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative type of research employing the phenomenological method of research to explore the survival strategies of informal street vendors. This study was conducted in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines. The researchers chose the place of implementation because it gave the researchers the needed information. The study informants were fifteen (15) informal street vendors (11 females; 4 males). The selection of the informants in a qualitative study followed the rule of data saturation. Considering the sampling requirements of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) based on Smith and Osbron (2015), a purposive sample was adopted. Informal street vendors trading along the streets and sidewalks in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, have been informal street vendors for over five or more years already and have no other source of income besides street vending have participated in the study. The age of the informants who participated in the study ranges from 22-64years old, and they originated in different provinces (Cagayan; Leyte; Negros Occidental; Pangasinan) but is operating within Tuguegarao City, Cagayan.

**Table 1.** Profile of the informants of the study

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Products Sold</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
ISV01	Female	61	Vegetables and Herbs	August 2021
ISV02	Male	31	Fried Chicken	August 2021
ISV03	Female	53	Filipino Street Food andBuko Juice	August 2021
ISV04	Female	42	Filipino Street Food	August 2021
ISV05	Female	55	Mani, Balot, Penoy, Salted Egg, Juice, Mais	September 2021
ISV06	Female	64	Common stationary supplies (e.g. ballpen, paper)	September 2021
ISV07	Male	41	Filipino Street Food	September 2021
ISV08	Female	38	Vegetables	September 2021
ISV09	Male	41	Kalamares, Tokneneng, Kwek-kwek, Shanghai, Buko juice	September 2021
ISV10	Female	40	Kalamares, Shanghai, Lumpiang gulay, Kwek-kwek, Tokneneng	October 2021
ISV11	Female	34	Lutong Bahay (ulam)	October 2021
ISV12	Female	53	Lugaw, Mami	October 2021
ISV13	Female	22	Mani	October 2021

ISV14	Female	52	Karne	October 2021
ISV15	Female	41	Pulutan (e.g. Pato)	October 2021

Moreover, the informants sell different products, either food or non-food. Food includes vegetables and herbs and Filipino street foods like Shanghai, tokening, and kalamares; informants also sell lugaw, mani, ballot, mais, and juice. Aside from the informants who have stated to sell food, one of the informants also said that she is selling common stationary supplies that are considered a non-food type of product. Although the informants sell a variety of things, they all have the same goal in mind; to sell as much as they can since they have a family to support. Although the pandemic has damaged the informal street vendors we spoke with, they continue to push and strive for the sake of their loved ones.

**Table 2.** Demographic profile of the informants of the study

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	11	73%
Male	4	27%
Total	15	100%
Age		
40 years old and below	5	33.33%
41 years old	3	20%
42 to 52 years old	2	13.33%
53 years old	2	13.33%
55 years old and above	3	20%
Total	15	100%

The study utilized a one-on-one interview using a phone call to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of informal street vendors and to be able to identify the different survival strategies employed by the informal street vendors. As a data-gathering strategy, the researchers used a semi-structured interview, a standard qualitative research technique. The data for this research was compiled from a set of primary data collected from informal street vendors in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan. Through this, the informants described themselves thoroughly during the interview process and how they responded differently to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their business operations. As a result, speech gaps, interruptions, and phonetic and paralinguistic features were eliminated on purpose. A semi-structured interview is used to collect data. The researchers visited the place of sale and personally got the details (Name and Phone number) of qualified informants for interview. The purpose of the research was thoroughly explained by the researchers to the informants, and all of their queries were promptly addressed. Afterwards, their consent to participate and have the interview recorded was sought. Following the IATF protocols, the researchers interviewed each of the informants via phone call. The interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, and manual transcription was produced for each of the fifteen individual verbatim transcripts.

Using the funnelling approach (Smith & Osborn, 2008), questions of the interview schedule is created to be versatile, unbiased, and non-leading. With the initial questions, appropriate prompts will be used to allow informants to elaborate on the details. If necessary, successive interviews will be respectively re-defined by taking novel data from the previous one, ensuring the refinement of the original schedule. The following are some of the questions that were asked:

1. How did the pandemic affect your street vending operations?

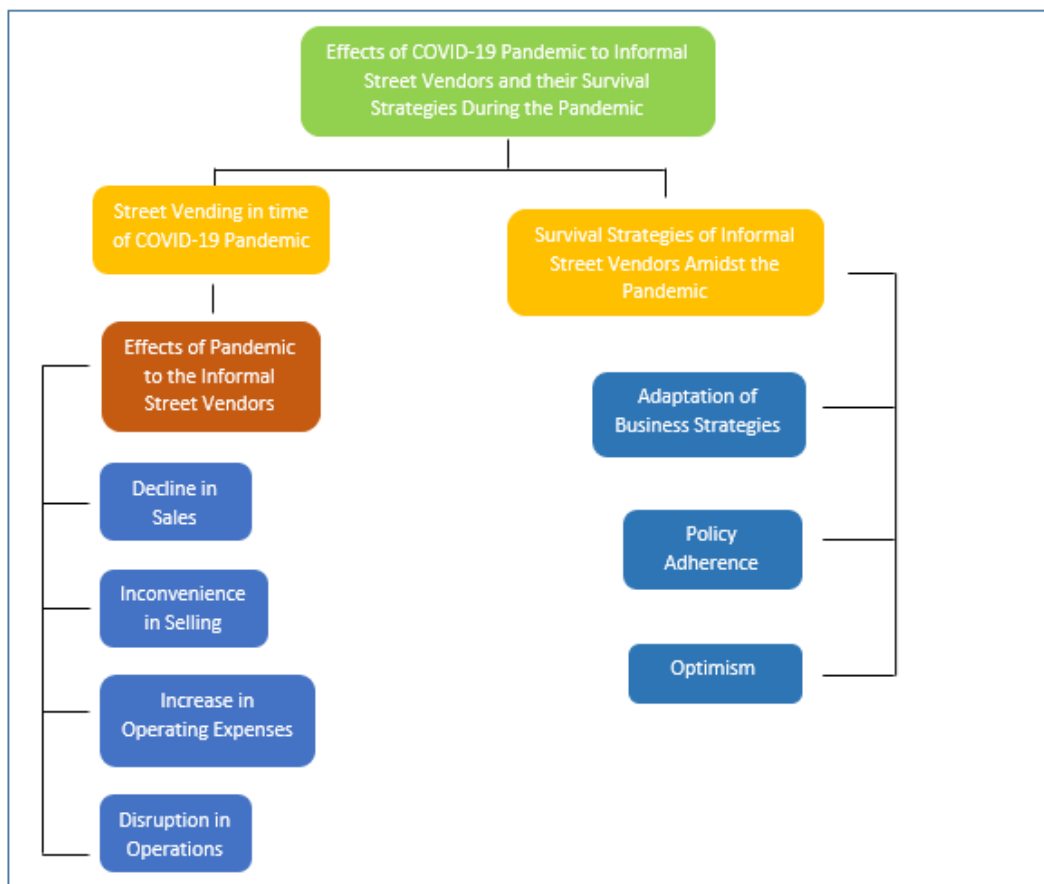
2. What are the survival strategies you employ to overcome such challenges?

The verbatim transcripts were utilized as crude information for investigation utilizing IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Underneath are the steps that are taken after the analysis:

1. Transcripts were examined and re-read completely to get a common thought of the informant's account. At the same time, the rising subjects, as well as novel, subtle elements by the members, are noted.
2. Following, the transcripts are re-visited, and titles are given to the subjects that emerged, which builds a better level of reflection whereas keeping the original account of the informants intact.
3. The new topics are known, however, once more and condensed to urge the 'essence' of the lived encounters of the informants.
4. Following, clusters of related topics over the transcripts are distinguished, and a list of main topics is created by the researchers to guarantee confront legitimacy. The main and the subordinate subjects are afterwards refined, altered, and finalized by the researchers. The objective is to form beyond any doubt that the examination is coordinating the informants' accounts and each account displayed is justified by the data.

Lastly, informants are guaranteed the confidentiality of their interviews and the ensuing information emerging from the same. The anonymity of the members is ensured by all implies, for which they are given nom de plumes and any data that seem to uncover their character will be wiped out from the transcripts. The information is stored in a password-protected folder. They are free to reach out to the researchers in case they feel any inconvenience amid and after the interview.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**



**Figure 1.** Survival Strategies Among Informal Street Vendors During COVID-19

This research study explored the survival strategies employed by informal street vendors. It further sought the effects of COVID-19 on their business and how they address the affix issues concerning the survival of their livelihood. The present investigation was guided by an interview schedule, which was constructed to bring out in-depth responses by the study informants pertaining to their experiences amid the COVID-19 crisis. Data analysis led to the development of two master themes that could suffice the objectives of the study. The first one discusses the state of street vending in time COVID-19 Pandemic. On the other hand, the second master theme explores the ways of informal street vendors in coping with the pandemic.

The results transcribe one subordinate theme when it comes to the state of street vending in time of COVID-19 Pandemic, which is the effects of the Pandemic on Informal Street Vendors. Meanwhile, three subordinate themes for survival strategies of informal street vendors amidst the pandemic were extracted from the responses of the informants, which include (1) Adaptation of Business Strategies, (2) Policy Adherence, and (3) Optimism.

### **Street vending in time of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### ***Theme 1. Effects of the Pandemic to the Informal Street Vendors***

One of the major themes in this study is the effects of a pandemic on informal street vendors. The result of the study revealed that many of the informant experience (a) a decline in sales, (b) inconvenience in selling, (c) an increase in operating expenses, and (d) disruption of operations.

#### **A. Decline in Sales**

The pandemic had a massive impact on the business operations of informal street vendors. The study reveals that the majority of the informants suffered from a decrease in sales because of fewer customers. They also expressed that it is difficult for them to sell.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"Few customers [...]"-Lizalyn Ferrer*
2. *"Low income. Sometimes we don't have sales because there are only a few customers during night time."- Sarah Corpuz*
3. *"Because of the restrictions, our income decreases when the pandemic starts [...]"-Petra Cepeda*
4. *"It is not easy to sell; customers are very few."- Janet Santiago*
5. *"It is hard to sell during this pandemic."- Donabelle Follante*

The economy has always been challenging, inflicting various responses from different sectors of the community. Perhaps, problems are transparent in many forms where conflicts in activities arise. One of the drivers of today's economy is the informal sectors, specifically the informal street vendors. During this difficult time, informal street vendors are considered to be one of the most vulnerable sectors. This study revealed that due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, informants suffered a decrease in sales. This is the same as the findings of Pitoyo et al. (2021), stating that the pandemic reduced income or no income for informal street vendors. According to Shafi et al. (2020) and Wegerif (2020), informal street vendors are facing several issues, such as financial, a decrease in demand, and a reduction in sales and profit, which is similar to the findings of this study.

#### **B. Inconvenience in Selling**

The policies implemented are for the wellness of the individuals. However, changes in policies due to the pandemic became a disadvantage that resulted in informants experiencing

prohibition in selling. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented government interventions have been witnessed by the informants. The study revealed that informants have negative experiences towards the implementation of safety protocols and strict monitoring.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"Authorities are prohibiting us from selling [...]"-Jenny Balane*
2. *"Sometimes authorities ask me to leave where I am selling."- Lorena Tagacay*
3. *"We are being confronted if we are not wearing a face shield or face mask."- Alma Centino*
4. *"Authorities are asking us to move to our place of selling."- Christian Panaga*
5. *"We are mandated to wear a face mask and face shield because there are authorities that are checking, and sometimes we are asked to move to our place."- Sarah Corpuz*
6. *"It is strict and a lot of rules; some are being caught."- Randy Tomas*
7. *"There are penalties if we are not wearing facemask and faceshield".- Victorina Maret*
8. *"It is mandatory to wear a face mask and face shield, and only two people are allowed per table. But it is okay for us to help minimize the spread of the virus."- Sarah Corpuz*
9. *"It is hard to work while wearing a face mask and face shield, and social distancing is needed."- Victorina Maret*

All of the informants reported how the policies intervene in their informal street vending operations. This is the same as the finding of the studies of Bamu & Dinesh (2021) and Asant & Mills (2020), stating that policies cause informal street vendors and shoppers not to invade some areas to limit interaction with other individuals. Informants have negative thoughts with regard to the policies implemented by the authorities, except for one. She thinks that the implemented policies of the government are helpful for the wellness of the citizens. Despite all of the adverse effects and experiences of following the safety protocols, one informant still manages to look for the brighter side of following the implemented safety protocols and strict monitoring.

COVID-19 has completely changed the rules of the game. Street food vendors are badly affected by this pandemic, and they need to re-adjust themselves as per new policies. Informants have pleaded their complaints about the regulatory dilemma they encountered with the implementation and strict monitoring of safety protocols which suggests the same with the current research (Mitullah, 2003; Nirathron, 2006; Shaiara et al., 2015, as cited in Arsene et al., 2020; Asante and Mills, 2020). With these government interventions, operating the business became harder for informal street vendors. The wearing of a face mask and face shield was inconveniencing them from moving freely as usual, making them less productive. (Arsene et al., 2020). Informants have said to struggle as they work because of safety protocols which result in fewer customers. These findings are consistent with a recent study which states that customers and informal street vendors had to wear masks all the time, and they need to observe adherence to the policies. With these, customers are reluctant to buy from informal street vendors, which makes it even harder for them to earn their bread and butter during this pandemic (Shumaila Zeb et al., 2021). This is further supported by a study which found that the majority of informal street vendors raised concerns about having fewer customers (Kim et al., 2020). Some are even asked to move out of their place of sale, or otherwise, they'll be paying a penalty. According to Bamu and Dinesh (2021), authorities prevented some traders from returning to their original positions or moved them away from natural markets to less visible trading spaces. The difficulty of dealing with safety protocols is evident on their stand. Getting the gist of their experiences and situation, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are primarily negative on their street vending business.

### **C. Increase in Operating Expenses**

Sales for informal street vendors are in decline with the current situation, and the expenses



are also uncontrollable for them at some point. Few informants expressed their concerns with regard to the increase in fares, which resulted in an increase in their operating expenses. Moreover, changes happened in public activities caused them to experience difficulty in selling.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"Our expense increased because of the fare [...]"-Victorina Maret*
2. *"[...] the fare charge increased."-Alma Centino*

The nature of street vending is the existence of uncertainty and insecurity, whereas their work encompasses a field of challenges (Nakisani et al., 2013). In the study of Dzawanda et al. (2021), they mentioned that the informal sector had encountered great difficulty in their operations with the impact of COVID-19, which is the same as the experience of the informants and said to face difficulties in transportation at times and higher fare than the usual before the pandemic existed the results in increased of operational expenses.

#### **D. Disruption in Operations**

Informants were also asked if they had considered temporarily shutting down their street vending operation. Most of the informants directly said "no," and few of them responded that they had thought about it but continued their activities, considering the lack of opportunities and the absence of alternatives.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"Because of the pandemic [...] I did not sell for a month."- Jenny Balane*
2. *"Because of the pandemic, the operation frequently stops." Sarah Corpuz*
3. *"When the peak of pandemic I stop selling for two weeks." - Janet Santiago*
4. *"unable to sell if lockdown."- Michael Labang*

Disruption in operations is one of the effects of COVID-19 on the informants. The majority of the informants do not want to stop operating because it is the only option for them to make a living (Handoyo and Setiawan, 2018). Due to the implementation of lockdown or enhanced community quarantine, they are forced to not operate for a while (Wegerif, 2020; Shafi et al., 2020). Despite their struggles during COVID-19, they still take such risks just to supply the needs of the community and fight for their households' welfare during this critical period. (Arsene et al., 2020; Olaposi, 2021; Meher, 2020; Gaterak et al., 2020).

#### **Survival Strategies of Informal Street Vendors Amidst the Pandemic**

It was realized in this study that upon determining the effects of the pandemic, ways how to cope with the circumstances are apprehended by the informants themselves through employing survival strategies that are practical and efficient in their current situation. Furthermore, in this study, the majority of the informants were able to convey some strategies they employed to overcome the challenges and address the changes brought by the pandemic. The following is the subordinate theme under this category which includes:

The informants reported employing survival strategies keenly to be able to keep their livelihood running amidst the interference of the pandemic. Following these strategies enables them to continuously operate their business and keep their means of support.

##### ***Theme 1. Adaptation of Business Strategies***

To cope with the effects of the pandemic, the informants shared different survival strategies that they employed. They shared different strategies, including selling longer hours, lending the goods that were not able to sell, limiting the goods to sell, having a friendly approach to the

customers, and being kind and treating them with respect. Most respondents said that implementing the above strategies helps them manage their operations during the pandemic.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"Longer time of selling, I will just give a discount to the customer so that they will buy more."*- Jenny Balane
2. *"If there are no sales, I will sell the other day earlier."*- Sarah Corpuz
3. *"If there are products that I haven't sold, I will just lend them to others"*- Maryrose Go
4. *"Limit products to be sold to avoid parish of goods."*- Christian Panaga
5. *"Do budgeting."*- Maribeth Taguinod
6. *"Cost-saving, limit the product to sell the other day if possible [...]"*-Maribeth Taguinod
7. *"Be patient, don't be a snob, it would help if you were friendly."*- Jovelyn Bacud
8. *"To keep them as customers, you must be kind and treat them well."*- Alma Centino
9. *"I communicate effectively with my customers. The same way with my suppliers, resulting in which I receive a discount."*- Alma Centino
10. *"I treat them with respect."*- Lorena Tagacay
11. *"Need to sell alternative products that are in demand like the mask and face shield."*- Alma Centino
12. *We just offer to take out and prohibit dine-in for the meantime to avoid interactions."*- Maribeth Taguinod
13. *"We need to accept the new normal, and we need to adjust until this pandemic is over."*- Janet Santiago

According to Pollack et al. (2020), as cited in the study of Thai et al. (2021), measures are enacted to mitigate the COVID-19 outbreak. Restrictions to street vending activities are not exempted. Dealing with the effects of the pandemic was never easy for informal street vendors. They are to look for ways to cope. If not, their survival will not be granted. As the informants continue to sail their business amidst the pandemic, they've reported practising some strategies as their means of survival. To most of the informants, developing management schemes has been a relatively practical solution. Informal street vendors extend their operating hours, their excess products are lent to neighbours, and they also develop discount propaganda. They also pursue good customer and supplier relationship management to maintain healthier business operations and practice cash and inventory management by cost-saving, limiting the products they sell to avoid parish goods, and cutting off their expenses. These findings are supported by existing knowledge that stipulates strategies employed by informal street vendors to survive (Forkuor et al., 2017; Gama et al., 2018; Mramba et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2016; Walsh, 2010). Furthermore, Even with the presence of regulatory measures, informal sectors such as street hawkers, 'food-to-mouth' vendors and etc., appear to increase their vulnerability (Thai et al., 2021). The risk is high, yet informal street vendors continue their business because it is their only means to support their living. Instead of closing their street vending activities, few have resorted to considering selling alternative goods and selling for takeout instead of dining in adapting to the situation, the same as indicated in the study by Amoah-Mensah (2016) that adapting to different situations and the environment, as a whole, enables the informal street vendors to survive and serve their customers in a better way.

### ***Theme 2. Policy Adherence***

Policies are set to provide order, and with our current situation, adherence to policies is greatly needed not just to provide order but also for the safety of everybody. Some of the safety protocols that are in practice with the current situation are wearing face masks and face shields,

social distancing and curfew hours. The informants have responded to practice policy adherence for better street vending operations.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"We just need to follow the protocol to avoid encountering problems."*- Alma Centino
2. *"We just need to follow because it is for our own sake."*-Jovelyn Bacud

Just like the other economic sectors, the informal sector was put under threat. That's why countries all over the world decided to implement drastic measures to fight the effects of a pandemic. The immediate strategy is to limit transmission and minimize the harm of the pandemic (Pitoyo et al., 2021). The informal street vendors have no other choice but to adhere to the policies and safety protocols stated by the authorities to avoid encountering problems in their operations and for their safety as well as negating the study of Thulare & Moyo (2021) stating that the mounting pressure of not being able to provide for their family's needs pushed informal street traders to continue their operations disregarding the safety regulations. The situation has pushed many to resort to defying the lockdown regulations and go over with their normal informal business activities since they have no other means of survival (Nyathi, 2020, as cited in the study of Pitoyo et al., 2021).

### **Theme 3. Optimism**

A positive outlook attracts positive energy. Having negative thoughts in times of struggle will just make things look harder. Thinking good despite the bad situation you are in helps loosen up the situation and gives you the courage to continue moving forward despite the challenges. Most of the informants revealed that a positive mindset greatly helps them to continue their business.

Some of the verbalizations of the informants are as follows:

1. *"Always have a positive mindset and never give up. Always thank the Lord."*- Victorina Maret
2. *"Keep going even if life is hard, don't lose hope because this is just a challenge for us."*- Janet Santiago
3. *"Be persistent"*- Randy Tomas

Informal street vendors are the most vulnerable group during this time of the pandemic, not only with regard to their livelihood but also to contagion risk (Thanh et al., 2021). On top of that, the way how informal street vendors are behaving and their attitude towards fighting against COVID-19 play a big part (Yusuf et al., 2020). Despite all the difficulties, the strong will to survive, a positive mindset, and hard work are reportedly the foundation of all the informants. Their optimism plays a big role in keeping them going and surviving (Handoyo and Setiawan, 2018). Although a definite day is yet to confirm when the pandemic ends, there is still hope and optimism for informal street vendors to face a more conducive economic situation (Kasim et al., 2021).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study concludes that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are primarily negative for street vending businesses. The informal street vendors suffered from a decline in sales, inconvenience in selling, an increase in operating expenses, and disruption in operations. However, due to the resilience of the informants, they are able to cope-up by employing survival strategies such as adaptation of business strategies, policy adherence, and optimism. COVID-19 lingers in our environment; most are not in their greater state. Nonetheless, challenges are always equipped with solutions. Implementation of survival strategies has helped the informal street vendors to cope amidst the pandemic, yet uncertainty still surrounds their situation; how long they'll keep their position is still a vague term for them. Findings on the survival strategies support the findings of

Rosales (2013) stating the reliance on kinship, Forkuor et al. (2017); Gama et al. (2018); Mramba et al. (2014); McKay et al. (2016); Walsh (2010) stating the use of social capital like social norms, social networks, and trust as the survival strategies of informal street vendors. Meanwhile, present results on the effects of COVID-19 also support the results of the studies of Shafi et al. (2020) and Wegerif (2020), revealing that informal street vendors are facing several issues, such as a financial decrease in demand and a reduction in sales and profit.

### **LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH**

The researchers recommend the following based on the findings and conclusions yielded from the study: Firstly, for future researchers, since the study is currently chosen to conduct data gathering on informal street vendors residing in an urban area, it would be substantial to consider choosing the rural areas as well to compare the strategies applied and challenges encountered with different environments. Gathering data on the effects of the pandemic on the informal sector in terms of sales when the pandemic starts comparing it after a year. Having a grasp of the situation will also be a good area to investigate.

For government and educational institutions, the informants were asked if the government had provided any assistance to them. Few have accepted it and acknowledged that it had been a considerable benefit. With these, government and educational institutions may implement programs such as Capital Assistance Program that may help the informal street vendors. Implement a project that will be exclusive for informal street vendors of Tuguegarao City, Cagayan. The Capital Assistance Program aims to help informal street vendors continuously make a living and alleviate poverty by offering them loan capital payable for six months and zero interest rates or terms that can be adjusted. Moreover, to include free training and seminars about capital management, budgeting, marketing, and handling business amidst the challenging situation would be better. Close and active monthly monitoring must be adhered to to ensure the efficient utilization of the capital.

Lastly, for the field practitioners, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding the effects of the pandemic on street vending businesses and how to cope with these effects. Hence, it can also be used by field practitioners as a basis for exploring business-related challenges and strategies during this time of the pandemic.

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