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Exploring Work-Life Balance among Women Entrepreneurs of Food Vending Business in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Women engaged in street food vending face a myriad of challenges as they juggle business activities and family obligations. The complexities of managing both spheres often disrupt their pursuit of a balanced life, impacting their overall well-being. This study **aims** to reveal the work-family dynamics of female food vendors and uncover the strategies employed to navigate these challenges. Qualitative research **methods** were used to understand the work-life balance among women food vendors. The **data** were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of street food vendors in Africa. **Findings** reveal the persistent struggle of women food vendors to achieve equilibrium between work and family responsibilities. Although they employ a variety of strategies, ranging from working extended hours to relying on external support such as grandparents or domestic help, these approaches often prove insufficient and unsustainable. Moreover, the utilization of such strategies can lead to conflicts with employers. Through an examination of daily routines, work-life balance, and coping mechanisms, the author's **conclusions** shed light on the intricate interplay between entrepreneurship, personal responsibilities, and resilience within the dynamic street vending landscape.

Keywords: street vendors; informal economy; work-life; work; family; women; food vendor; Africa; Tanzania

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Исследование баланса между работой и личной жизнью женщин — продавцов продуктов питания в странах Африки

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Женщины, занимающиеся уличной торговлей едой, сталкиваются с множеством проблем, совмещая деловую деятельность и семейные обязанности. Сложности управления обеими сферами часто нарушают их стремление к сбалансированной жизни, влияя на их общее благополучие. **Цель** данного исследования — выявить динамику отношений между работой и семьей у женщин — продавцов еды и раскрыть стратегии, используемые для преодоления этих трудностей. Для изучения баланса между работой и личной жизнью среди женщин — продавцов продуктов питания были использованы качественные **методы** исследования. Данные были собраны посредством интервью, обсуждений в фокус-группах и наблюдений за уличными торговцами едой в Африке. **Результаты** показывают постоянную борьбу женщин — продавцов продуктов питания за достижение баланса между работой и семейными обязанностями. Хотя они используют различные стратегии, начиная от работы сверхурочно и заканчивая привлечением внешних помощников,

таких как бабушки и дедушки или домашняя прислуга, эти подходы часто оказываются недостаточными и неустойчивыми. Более того, использование таких стратегий может привести к конфликтам с работодателями. Благодаря изучению распорядка дня, баланса между работой и личной жизнью, а также механизмов преодоления трудностей, **выводы** автора проливают свет на сложное взаимодействие между предпринимательством, личными обязанностями и жизнестойкостью в динамичном ландшафте уличной торговли. **Ключевые слова:** уличные торговцы; неформальная экономика; баланс работы и жизни; работа; семья; женщины; продавцы еды; Африка; Танзания

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Introduction

This research focuses on understanding how women food vendors strive to achieve a good balance between work and family commitments. Work-life balance is becoming an important field in management sciences, yet unpopular in the informal sector. Work-life balance is the equilibrium between needs for work and an individual's life [1]. It is about a struggle for the balance between work-family and work-life. Reconciling work and family demands is difficult, and balance between them is achieved only when work affairs do not substitute home or family life and vice versa [2]. Women are more likely to be affected negatively by a work-life balance than men due to household responsibilities [1]. Women working in the informal sector are more likely to fail to balance work and life, given their poor working conditions [3]. Unlike in the formal sectors, people in informal businesses have a poor payment system, they do not have formal working hours or job descriptions.

Work-life balance studies are important in the street vending business given the proliferation of informal trading activities around the world. Work-life balance has long been a concern for those interested in the quality of one's working life and its relationship to one's overall quality of life. The increased interest in work-life balance research reflects a perception that this is an agenda worth investigating and is an issue of contemporary interest [4]. Work-life balance is one of the most important aspects that human resource managers must consider in the contemporary working environment [1]. Although important, little is known about the work lives of street food vendors. There is a paucity of research on work-life balance in the informal trade sub-sector. Most of the available research on street food vending businesses focuses on social economic aspects, challenges, motivations, and

connections with formal businesses [5–9]. To our knowledge, this is the first research to address the work-life balance of street food vending in Africa.

A food vending business can be defined as a process of cooking, distributing, and selling foods, vegetables, fruits, and drinks on the street [6]. Food vendors sell diverse types of foods cooked on the street or brought from home. The main buyers of street food are poor, low-income earners, wage laborers, students, pupils, and travelers [10]. People buy street food because of convenience, low prices, and flexibility [3]. However, low-priced food vending businesses are criticized for poor food hygiene, a lack of safety, deceptive practices, and foodborne illnesses like mild diarrhea and food poisoning [11]. Many women are employed and/or invested in street food vending businesses due to ease of entry (no interview, no need for schooling certificates, no need for experience) [12]. Street food vending is a very flexible business since one can change anything anytime. Street food vendors can change location, menu, and working hours, and others will have a few negative effects. The street food vending business in Africa is primarily women's work [13]. Research shows that street food vendor working conditions in Tanzania are characterized by poor working conditions, e.g., informality, low pay, pay uncertainty, long working hours, a poor physical environment, a lack of training, employment insecurity, a lack of legal recognition, an unclear legal standing, and a lack of social security and protection.

Street food vending is a source of employment and income for poor African women [9]. The revenue from the food vending business is used to pay for health, education, accommodation, and self-development, hence economic growth [14]. It plays a big role in poverty reduction, improving the quality of living and reducing government burdens [7]. Food vendors supply low-priced and nutritious

food for poor urban students, travelers, and wage workers who cannot afford formal restaurants price. Mobile food vendors offer their services to people working in remote areas, e.g., construction sites and mining areas, where formal restaurants are unavailable.

In many countries, the street food business is not subject to formal regulations exercised by either local government authorities or national authorities or agencies, hence becoming victims of evictions, asset confiscations, fines, and sometimes jail sentences [8]. Food vendors are informal in that their job is unprotected; they have excessive regulation from the local authority, low productivity, unfair treatment, do not adhere to labour laws or payment of tax, are involve in underground or shadow operations, and have unclear legal status [15]. Since street food vendors are informal workers, they are subject to long working hours, evictions, confiscation of their products, not being covered by social and health security funds, difficult working environments with unclear labour laws, and sometimes discrimination from formal business owners [16]. Food vendors lack the necessary skills, knowledge and technical know-how to handle the food hygienically and make their businesses competitive [17]. In addition, food vendors lack the money and assets necessary to start and run the business profitably [9]. Little finance means diseconomies of scale, less exploitation of full opportunities, and limited business growth. Street food buyers perceive different risks like hygiene, health, unsanitary utensils, absence of handwashing, improper food storage conditions, ingredients, and improper waste management [18]. Women's street food vendors are also constrained by work-life balance conflict. Women experience many challenges when trying to find a balance between work and family lives due to cultural factors, insufficient time, family roles, gender biases, and the nature of their work [19].

The focus of this research is to explore: What does a street food vendor's typical day look like? What is the work-life balance features of street food vendors? How do street food vendors strategize to balance work and life?

Literature review

Food vendors are available both in poor and developed countries; for example, food vending is estimated to be a \$ 20 billion industry in the United States [20]. In Japan, street food stalls

contributed to about 190 million [21]. All over the world, there is a shift towards eating foods prepared outside (away) from home, creating motives for starting food vending [22], including the street food business. Street food vending is the most visible of the informal economy and has been an important income-generating activity, particularly for the poorer urban residents in many developing countries [23]. Millions of people use street food daily because they work far away from their homes, and the vendors offer a wide variety of foods at a low cost and are easily accessible. Street food buyers are youth, students, travellers, children, adults, couples, singles, and low-income earners [10]. Street food vending assures food security for low-income urban populations and offers an opportunity for developing small-scale entrepreneurs. No matter how small-scale the business, street food vending provides employment, income, and food security, empowering millions of poor, less educated, and women in general [24]. The income generated from food vending is used to pay rent, school fees, health services, shelter, and clothes, hence fighting against poverty [5].

Like other informal workers, food vendors operate outside the legal system, and their businesses are not formally registered like formal restaurants. Lack of formal registrations denies their right to access public services such as training, finance, social and health security, and other development assistance [12]. Furthermore, urban food vendors lack entrepreneurial skills and business education to make their businesses competitive and sustainable [25]. All these limitations make the urban food vending sector a "survivalist business", daring to survive nor to grow and having little or no significant impact on economic growth, which it actually has [26]. Therefore, in this research, we expect to add to the body of knowledge on modernizing the urban food vending sector to make it inclusive for poverty alleviation and economic growth.

Work-life balance in the informal sector has attracted the attention of different scholars [27–29]. Most studies concluded that work-life balance affects the performance of informal sector activities [2, 19, 29]. They see that work-life balance can affect positively or negatively healthy family affairs, social networks, and the general life of informal workers [30]. A study in South Africa [31] revealed that girls and women employed in the informal sector have

work-family fit and therefore require attention like their counterparts in the formal sector. Research [32] in Tanzania sees women as the most victims of work-life imbalance, given their responsibility to raise children, care for the family and cook, as backgrounded by African culture. Another research in Kerala, India, shows an imbalance between the work and life of unorganized women due to insecurity, long working hours, and lower wages [33]. Scholars worldwide have confirmed the positive relationship between good working conditions and business success and employee well-being [2, 4]. Working conditions significantly correlate with better self-assessed and objective health [12]. Poor work-life balance causes material and human losses, reduces productivity, and impairs workers' health and well-being [30]. The 2019 World Employment and Social Outlook (WESO) shows that around 3.3 billion people employed globally in 2018 had inadequate economic security, material well-being, and equality of opportunity, hence a difficult work-life balance [34]. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most vulnerable in the world, where 70% of employees are in poor working conditions with limited access to social protection, low earnings, the absence of job contracts, and so on [35].

Work-life balance in formal business differs from the street vending business, which is a typical family-owned or sole proprietorship undertaking. Family and sole proprietorships have no formal policies, regulations, or procedures like formal enterprises. Research [36] on women entrepreneurs in the Philippines revealed three strategies applied to balance work-life activities: having the business located at or close to the living area, participating in stress-relieving hobbies, and scheduling work and domestic duties in advance. Furthermore, the women entrepreneurs in the Philippines use other strategies such as information gathering, goals or objectives setting, and systematic planning, monitoring and control. A study by [37] recommended that women entrepreneurs improve their work-life balance by adopting modern, innovative work-life balance strategies such as adding support from spouse and family, stress management activities, and redesigning workflow to make it more flexible. Goal setting, seeking and using information properly, good planning and monitoring, effective time management, and forging activities to bring together the family.

Research methodology

The study was carried out in the Mbeya district in the wards of: Forest, Ghana, Iduda, Iganjo, Iganzo, Igawilo, Ilemi, and Ilomba. The rationale for selecting the Mbeya district lies in the fact that it is the fastest-growing city in Tanzania, dominated by women street vendors. As per the Tanzania National Center (2022), the Mbeya region had 229,056 women compared to 217,280 men. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to understand the work-life balance among women food vendors. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The qualitative approach is relevant given its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of complex issues and insights into the settings and activities of the research participants under review, hence providing the research with an opportunity to gain sensitive insights into multiple realities, experiences, and interactions of individuals and groups.

There were five focus discussion groups (FGDs), each of which was composed of eight participants, or 40 individuals in total. FGD meetings were held at Ward Executive offices located in each ward. Respondents were selected randomly from the list of street food vendors provided by the Ward Executive Officers. The respondents were informed in advance (two days before the meeting), allowing them to schedule their businesses. Three interviewers were present at the meeting, and all audio was recorded with the consent of the respondents. FGDs aimed at answering the key research questions: What does a street food vendor's typical day look like? What are the work-life balance features of street food vendors? How do street food vendors strategize to balance work and life?

In-depth interviews were conducted with selected women's food vendors. Selection criteria were having more than five years of experience, being a leader in food vending informal groups, and women who found doing business together with children. Interviews were conducted just near their business area to allow convenience and flexibility for respondents. Interviews were carried out in the evening when the number of customers was few and some of the businesses were already closed. The interview lasted for 15 to 25 minutes. The focus of the interview was to answer the key research questions for this study. A total of 12 interviews were conducted and reached data saturation, hence no need to go for more interviewees.

Qualitative data, tape recorders, and notebooks were used to collect and, later, generate data for analysis. After every interview, the researchers reflected on the relevance of the information generated against the critical decisions that were made based on that information. Finally, a quick preview was done to see how the themes responded to the research questions and objectives and to identify overarching patterns and conclusions. The consultant took note of any contrasts among sources and, lastly, highlighted the information that answered the research questions.

Research findings

What does street food vendor day look like?

Urban vendors reported waking up early in the morning, around 04:00 a.m. to 06:00 a.m. They must wake up very early in the morning to perform family responsibilities before going to work. Most of the respondents have phone alarms to remind them when to wake up. Women vendors start by preparing breakfast for children to go to school. Children's preparation includes ironing clothes, bathing, preparing their breakfast, checking their exercise books, and making sure they go to school. When they wake up, they go to suppliers or markets to buy merchandise for cooking. Usually, at such a time, there is no public transport; therefore, they use motorcycles, walk-in groups, or hire commuter buses to pick them up (which is expensive). After getting the stock, some vendors go back home to undertake family activities, others go directly to businesses; while others, e.g., fish soup sellers, go to prepare it. The interviews revealed that the time for opening businesses differs from one category of vendors to another; bus stand vendors, city center vendors, and breakfast sellers start businesses from around 05:00 a.m. to 06:30 a.m. Most of the mobile food vendors start from 10:00 a.m. onwards. Most of the women vendors start businesses late because they need to settle family matters first.

The interviews with urban vendors who start businesses at around 04:00 a.m. revealed many risks they encounter. These include walking with cash, which is very dangerous for them. They reported knowing some of their friends who were robbed of their money and mobile phones by thieves. Also, leaving the family, including children, asleep is not appealing because they may not know whether the children will wake up okay or not. Other women

vendors claimed their husbands do not like to see them leaving early in the morning, hence leading to unnecessary conflicts. Observations found several children during the weekend and early evening helping their parents sell products. Some women and men help their partners conduct business when there is an emergency like funerals, ceremonies, sickness, etc. (this applies mostly to stationary vendors). Some vendors change their selling locations depending on the time. Women vendors prefer to sell near their homes in the evenings to enable them to undertake family activities while in business. It is common to find vendors displaying their cooked food at their doors in the late evenings.

The research revealed that all street traders do business every weekday, including Saturdays and some categories on Sundays. Food vendors, bus stand vendors, and near-marketplace vendors are examples of Sunday vendors. The interviews with Sunday vendors revealed that lack of sufficient sales during the week, a low level of competition during Sundays, low supply from formal shops on Sundays, access to the church population on Sundays, and family factors (children do not go to school on Sundays) are the reasons for doing business on Sundays. On the other side, those who do not do business on Sundays mentioned a lack of customers, the need to rest with families, and Sunday worship (going to church) as the main reasons. Most of the urban vendors close businesses from 06:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Darkness, security, distance from home, family responsibilities, nature of businesses, and availability of public transport are among the factors that determine what time to close the businesses. It was reported by various groups of vendors that they walk to their home places, which are located around 3 kilometers from their businesses.

How do women food vendors balance working and family responsibilities?

Different interviews were carried out during hours spent at food vending in a day, Interviewee 1 stated that.

"I arrive here at around 5 am and work for the whole day, times I go home at 9 pm".

Generally, the study findings indicate that most women food vendors in Mbeya spent nine hours, followed by 12 hours, at food vending a day, depending on the magnitude of family responsibilities that they had to meet on that particular day. Most food vendors started work as early as 5 am or 6 am offering breakfast to their customers, and yet by 9

pm, some could be seen still working despite being through a hectic day. This implies that women work long hours, leaving them in a position where they lack adequate time to fulfill their family responsibilities because they are overwhelmed by their productive role. They also indicated that the few hours after work are meant for family chores. This is contrary to the ILO Convention (No. 1) of 1919, which requires working hours to be limited to eight hours a day and forty-eight hours a week.

Street food vendors are one of the groups of people who work excessive hours. Some street food vendors' kiosks never close. They work for 24 hours a day (on a shift basis). At the bus stand, near hospitals, train stations, and near nightclubs' vendors work until morning. This is not surprising in Tanzania, Universally Street vendors work for many hours; in Mumbai, for example, the majority of vendors work for 10 hours [38], 8–12 in New Delhi, and in Bangkok, they work all hours of the day [35], and so on. Street food vendors do like to work such long working hours, as they need more income; therefore, they believe that if you add more working hours, your earnings will increase. Any attempt to cut off working hours will result in income loss, hence the negative consequences for their household. Long working hours have several self-rated health risks: low productivity, poor performance, stress, a lack of free time, and poor work-life balance. These findings suggest a need to educate food vendors on better time management, given the long-run effects of long working hours.

The study findings show that the majority of women food vendors carry out some family responsibilities while food vending. During the interviews, we saw some women food vendors breastfeeding their babies as they carried on their food vending chores. The interviews revealed that some vendors pick up their children from school or bus stands and stay with them until they close business. We observed some of the food vendors assisting each other to make hair while waiting for the customers. Some food vendors could buy food at markets or shops while waiting for the food to be ready for serving. Generally, food vendors do some activities while vending. This can be witnessed by this statement from the respondent.

“Yes, I try my best, but since I am a widow, I am challenged so hard to work because I am the father and mother to my children. My sweat is what feeds, treats, and takes them to school. I do work near my

home, so I run home a bit during the daytime to check on my elder children”.

Street vending is the most flexible form of microbusiness in Tanzania. It allows vendors to do other family responsibilities while vending. These flexibilities allow vendors to undergo other economic activities. The research in Dodoma [16] found some urban vendors who go farming during rainy seasons (December to March) and then back to urban vending from April to November. Research in Dar es Salaam found part-time urban vendors (at night they are security guards, and during the day they are urban vendors).

Several respondents reported sending their children to stay with grandparents in the village to give them a room for business. They have decided to send their children to grandparents who live in rural areas. One respondent stated that “I live alone; my two children are in the village, living with my father”. Grandparents (mostly in rural areas) who are mostly farmers will take care of the children by ensuring that they get food, school, and shelter. Each month, they send part of their income to grandparents to help care for their children. The interviewees reported that in the village, the cost of raising the children is low, mentioning bus fare, utilities, and food as examples. The analysis shows that the children sent to the village are those older than two years. This is a kind of urban-rural migration of children. Parents do not like living without their children; however, for the sake of employment demand, they send them to rural areas to live with their grandparents. Children being cared for and raised by grandparents is not new; in 2011, 7.7 million children lived in the same household as at least one of their grandparents in the United States of America. Several advantages come from living with grandparents, including the physical health of kids, knowing the native language, imitating cultural, moral, and good care. Additionally, grandparents are not busy as much as youth in urban areas, so there is more time to look after the children. Some drawbacks relating to grandparents raising children include a lack of resources to care for children, the inability to make children follow up at school, difficulty cooking, stress, and poverty in rural areas [39].

Several respondents reported paying co-workers to assist in doing what they were supposed to do when absent. This strategy is common among employed food vendors. If you leave the work site

before office closing hours, you need to get someone to care for your assignments; therefore, you have to pay for them. Interviews with respondents revealed that payments are made if someone does not come to the job, if arriving late, if they leave the office before closing hours, if they walk out for some family issues. The payment ranges from 0.3 USD to 0.5 USD, depending on the number of hours. Street food vendors do not like to take part of their income to pay others; however, they have to do so for the sake of work-life balance. Using co-workers to support balancing work and job was also observed by [39], though there was no payment. This can be confirmed by this respondent.

“Yesterday I was not here; I went to the hospital; my child was sick. I paid my co-worker 1500 Tanzanian shillings to help me wash dishes”.

Another strategy to balance work and family responsibility is to do some job work at home or do some home activities at work. The interview found some women sorting beans and rice, cooking snacks at home, and then bringing them to the vending kiosk. Our observation found women washing clothes and making hair and nails at work (activities supposed to be done at home). They reported doing this because of work-life balance difficulties. This is what [19] called (work-to-family versus family-to-work). During the interviews, we found some women preparing green vegetables to be cooked when they got back home. There are work demands and, at the same time, family demands on the same employee, hence work-life conflict. Women’s food vendors are using this strategy to reduce work and family stress.

Some street food vendors reported hiring housemaids to assist with family activities. Housemaid activities involve cooking, washing dishes, cleaning the house, and caring for children. Street food vendors reported paying between 15 and 25 USD for this service per month. Low-income food vendors do not use this strategy because it is too expensive when compared to their monthly salary. Hiring housemaids is a common strategy among employees in Tanzania, particularly those with kids. Some food vendors reported working seven days a week, with no public holiday. They do not have holidays because they want to earn more. They do not want to miss a cent. They do not have much money. Employees in food vending report to work over weekends and public holidays to compensate for the hours used for family care (late arrival, leave

before closing hours). Some respondents reported seeking assistance from relatives and neighbors to help them with some family issues, e.g., opening the door when children come back home from school, fetching water, giving children food, and others. Some respondents reported living with relatives, e.g., aunt, nephew, sisters, and brother to help them perform family responsibilities while on the job. Several respondents reported setting limits on assignments to be accomplished within a given period. If more activities remained unattended up to that time, they should have been postponed. This can be witnessed by one respondent in the city center. “You can’t do everything; some activities need to wait”.

The interviews revealed home activities such as washing clothes, sweeping the ground, cleanliness, and visiting neighbors and relatives as the most postponed activities. Some of the home activities that couldn’t be postponed were cooking, dishwashing, childcare, school affairs, and health-related activities. At work, the most postponed activities were cleanliness. Prioritizing and limiting activities (mostly nonessential activities) were also seen by [40]. Other respondents reported that.

“We need to set limits for the job and home activities; if you don’t set limits, then you will find yourself with no time for relationships and private affairs”.

Among the unethical work-life balance strategies used by street vendors is work absenteeism. Research finds that several vending employees do not appear at work without prior approval from their employers (an unreasonable and frequent absence from work). When they have excessive family responsibilities and can’t get permission from their employer, they decide not to go to work. This strategy is mostly used by women with kids, adults, and other vendors with some health problems. The interview with street vendors revealed that they do not know the long-run effects of work absenteeism. Repetitive work absenteeism reduces productivity, employee trust, quality of services, and work motivation, and causes conflicts and dissatisfaction with the employer [41]. Street food vendors do not like to appear to have a job; however, family activities force them to do so. This can be witnessed by this statement from the respondent.

“What should I do? My son is sick; my boss does not want to permit me, then I will not go to the job until my son is fine”.

Leave the working site even if they finish their responsibilities on time. Some respondents mentioned staying in their jobs even after normal hours if there was unsold food. Time management is an important strategy for achieving work-life balance and has been proven to be effective [42]. Some employees mentioned hard work, doing the right things at the right time, and commitment to the job and home to ensure a good work-life balance. They utilize the time they have efficiently. They do not lose even a minute. They do some assignments in advance; for example, they mentioned cleaning dishes as they come (do not accumulate). Hard work, commitment, time management, and doing things in advance enable them to finish their responsibilities on time, hence maintaining a good work-life balance.

Discussion and recommendations

Street food vending is an important employment opportunity for the less educated, poor, and women in the developing world. It is a source of income, low-priced food, market heterogeneity, and urban safety. Given the decline in formal employment, the increase in poverty, and urbanization, street food vending will continue to serve its purpose. Women (whether employers or employees) dominate street food vending; therefore, it is important to understand their work-life balance. However, many people, including policymakers, politicians, and the public, consider street food vendors a nuisance, troublemakers, and a rudimentary economy. Understanding street food vendors' work-life balance strategies is crucial to empowering them. Government authorities and development partners can use the findings of this study to design intervention strategies for improving street food vendors' work-life balance.

Street food vendors have the right to serve their families the same as other human beings. They need time to care for their families, rest, and enjoy life. However, they cannot; vending activities have already occupied their time. Any attempt to reduce vending hours ultimately results in low sales, hence the loss. Street vendors' initiatives to balance life and business have posed them with risks such as little sleeping hours, leaving children alone, thieves, and the risks of having children raised by grandparents. Little sleeping hours adversely affect street vendors in the short and long run. Poor work-life balance affects both women's and

men's vendors. It is associated with a decrease in productivity and a lot of overtime, hence tiredness, stress, burnout, emotional disorder and physical exhaustion, absenteeism, sickness, and employee turnover. Generally, the health of street food vendors is at risk due to poor work-life balance. Their job motivation, satisfaction, and sustainability are jeopardized by poor work-life balance.

What does a street food vendor's typical day look like? The findings are interesting. Women's food vendors are busily occupied by trading and family activities all day. There is no time to rest. They do not like to be occupied in such a way; however, it is their survival strategy. They have only 24 hours for everything (therefore, time is a limited resource), hence a call for opportunity costs to decide what, how, where, and when to do. This is in line with the words of a vendor [43], who saw time as the scarcest resource because, without it, nothing else can be controlled. Nothing else can be managed until we can manage time. Therefore, street food vendors should manage the time they have, not the activities they are required to accomplish. Excessive working hours are bad for the health and safety of workers. Negative effects like job dissatisfaction, mental health disorders, divorce, and multimorbidity are usually associated with long working hours [44]. Analysis of informal workers working hours by [45] revealed that they work excessive hours in difficult and unsafe working conditions, however, they are still poor. Female workers reported having more time demands than men.

Although trading activities occupy much of street food vendors' time, they don't ignore their families, particularly children. This is what many work-life balance researchers refer to as work-life conflict [46]. The struggle to balance brings several risks to street food vendors. A study by [7] in Accra, Ghana, confirmed that women's food vendors have several social and family responsibilities, that consume much of their trading time. Women are responsible for the majority of unpaid home affairs as well as caring for children, the elderly, and the sick. These women would experience role conflict when the simultaneous presence of these two sets of forces, hence became incompatible with one another. Attaining a successful work-life balance has proven to be both unachievable and stressful. Work-life conflict (formerly known as work-family conflict) is a type of life imbalance caused by time restrictions between work and family or general

life roles. When this happens, traders' ability to participate in both aspects of life becomes more difficult. When the energy, time, and behavioral demands of the workplace begin to conflict with family or personal life roles, this type of conflict arises.

Women food vendors leave their houses early in the morning and go back home late at night seven days a week. Walking at night and leaving the house and children alone at home brings risks. In Tanzania, particularly in cities like Mbeya, violent armed robbery, petty theft, and threats of violence are prevalent. Although Tanzania is a peaceful country, regular reports from police officers show victims of mugging and bag snatching (especially by-passing cars or motorbikes) and armed robbery and burglary throughout the country. One of the risk minimization strategies is to ensure the risks, which is impossible for street vending because of the informality. This calls for further research to establish how to minimize business risks for informal traders.

Modernizing street food vending entails a multifaceted approach that combines innovation, technology, and community engagement. Firstly, embracing digital platforms can revolutionize the way street food vendors operate. Developing mobile applications for ordering and payment, as well as leveraging social media for marketing and customer engagement, can significantly enhance visibility and accessibility. Additionally, implementing digital inventory management systems and analytics tools can optimize supply chain logistics and inform decision-making processes, leading to more efficient operations and reduced food waste. By embracing digital solutions, street food vendors can streamline their processes, attract a broader customer base, and stay competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace. Furthermore, fostering collaboration and partnerships within the community can further modernize street food vending. Initiatives such as food hubs or collective kitchens, where vendors can share resources, knowledge, and infrastructure, can promote innovation and sustainability. Moreover, collaborating with local governments to create designated street food zones with proper infrastructure and regulations can enhance safety and sanitation standards while preserving the vibrant street food culture. Engaging with local communities through events, pop-up markets, and food festivals can also create opportu-

nities for exposure and growth. By building strong networks and partnerships, street food vendors can collectively modernize their operations while preserving the authenticity and cultural richness of street food.

To support women food vendors, government policies should focus on creating an enabling environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by women in starting and growing businesses. This includes implementing targeted financial assistance programs such as grants, loans, and venture capital specifically earmarked for women-owned businesses. Additionally, establishing mentorship and networking initiatives to connect women food vendors with experienced mentors, industry experts, and potential collaborators can provide invaluable guidance and support. Furthermore, implementing policies that promote work-life balance, such as subsidized childcare and flexible working arrangements, can help alleviate some of the challenges women face in balancing entrepreneurship with family responsibilities. By actively promoting gender equality and implementing supportive policies, governments can empower women entrepreneurs to thrive, driving economic growth and fostering innovation.

Women food vendors in Mbeya have adopted strategies to balance street food vending and family responsibilities. Their strategies are effective but not sustainable. Some work-life balance strategies, e.g., work absenteeism, are unethical and have long-run effects on street food vendors and their employees. Some strategies taken by food vendors, e.g., vending with kids or walking out at midnight or earlier in the morning, are also risks to the vendors. Street food vendors use their little income to facilitate work-life balance, e.g., hiring house cleaners or compensating their co-workers. In general, street food vendors do not have a sustainable solution for work-life balance. Some street food vendors have despaired and waited for nature to decide itself. However, they need to be informed of the importance and alternative strategies for balancing work-life demands. The work-life balance dilemma is not only a topic of concern to food vendors but also affects even the formal sector, however, the magnitude differs. Formalizing a street vending business can be an important step towards empowering street vendors and assisting them in balancing work and family.

Conclusion

Delving into the typical day of a street food vendor sheds light on the intricacies of their work-life balance. Street food vendors navigate a dynamic and demanding environment where each day presents unique challenges and opportunities. Despite the long hours and physical demands of the job, many vendors find fulfillment in their work, fueled by a passion for cooking and a sense of entrepreneurship. However, achieving a harmonious work-life balance remains a constant challenge for street food vendors, who must juggle the demands of their business with personal responsibilities and aspirations. To nav-

igate this delicate balance, street food vendors employ various strategies, including efficient time management, prioritization of tasks, and leveraging social support networks. By adopting these strategies and adapting to the ever-changing landscape of street vending, vendors strive to carve out moments of respite and enjoyment amidst the hustle and bustle of their daily routines. Ultimately, understanding the work-life balance features of street food vendors underscores the resilience and resourcefulness inherent in their profession, while also highlighting the importance of supportive policies and initiatives to facilitate their well-being and success.

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