



# UNDERSTANDING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF WOMEN FISHMONGERS: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO FISH MARKETS OF MANGALORE CITY

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**Abstract:** Women fishmongers constitute an indispensable yet highly vulnerable segment of the informal coastal economy in urban India. Operating primarily within competitive, perishable retail structures, these women face elongated working hours, unpredictable income streams, and strenuous physical conditions. Consequently, managing a healthy equilibrium between professional demands and domestic obligations poses a critical structural challenge. This study presents an empirical investigation into the socio-economic determinants, structural challenges, and familial realities shaping the work-life balance of women fishmongers across major fish markets in Mangalore city. Utilizing a structured sampling design, primary data was collected from active retail fish vendors through questionnaires and field interviews, supplemented by secondary literature reviews. The empirical results reveal that severe infrastructural constraints, minimal social security measures, and rigid patriarchal expectations significantly exacerbate work-life conflict, directly affecting their physical well-being and domestic stability. Conversely, family-driven support structures and localized community networks offer vital resilience mechanisms. The study concludes with actionable, targeted structural and policy recommendations aimed at building safer market environments, establishing microfinance security nets, and deploying formal welfare architectures to improve the socio-economic status of these working women.

**Keywords:** Work-Life Balance, Women Fishmongers, Informal Economy, Coastal Management, Socio-Economic Strain, Support Systems.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The informal retail sector in developing economies serves as a critical source of survival, employment, and local economic resilience, with women actively spearheading small-scale enterprise setups. Within coastal urban systems like Mangalore city, Karnataka, the traditional fish retail sector relies heavily on the labor, resilience, and operational commitment of women fishmongers. These women operate as small-scale entrepreneurs, driving micro-distribution networks that connect large marine landings to individual household consumers. However, despite their substantial contribution to food security systems and regional Domestic cash flows, their operations remain embedded within the unprotected structures of the informal economy. This lack of formal recognition presents severe institutional challenges to their long-term occupational and domestic stability.

Work-life balance represents an individual's capacity to meet professional commitments while maintaining adequate time, psychological presence, and energy for familial and personal obligations. For women fishmongers, achieving this equilibrium is uniquely challenging. Their work routine demands early morning departures to wholesale docks, physically taxing logistics, continuous exposure to harsh market conditions, and stressful negotiations over highly perishable goods. Upon returning home, they encounter rigid socio-cultural frameworks that hold them primarily responsible for domestic chores, child care, and elderly management. The collision between these demanding professional obligations and unpaid domestic duties generates profound work-life conflict, severely affecting their physical health and personal well-being.

### Socio-Economic Fabric of Coastal Retail Activity

The entry of women into the fish vending trade is rarely a matter of career choice; rather, it emerges as a critical survival mechanism driven by acute socio-economic pressures, low household incomes, or structural unemployment among male family members. Historically passed down through coastal communities, this profession exposes women to high occupational vulnerability. They typically operate without formal employment contracts, institutional credit avenues, or state-backed health insurance, making their livelihood highly sensitive to market fluctuations, seasonal fishing bans, and shifting weather patterns.

### Statement of the Problem

While substantial academic literature addresses work-life balance within formal corporate and corporate banking sectors, the informal trading landscape particularly regarding traditional women fishmongers remains structurally understudied. Existing urban policies and local municipal market plans frequently overlook the distinct occupational pressures faced by women vendors, such as prolonged standing times, inadequate sanitation facilities, and a lack of on-site child care facilities. Consequently, there is an urgent need for an empirical study to map the precise socio-economic determinants and occupational hazards affecting the work-life balance of women fishmongers in Mangalore city, providing data-driven insights to inform future labor policy reforms and welfare interventions.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To systematically analyze this socio-economic environment, the study pursues the following core objectives:

- To evaluate the socio-economic backgrounds and household demographic profiles of women fishmongers operating within Mangalore city.
- To identify and document the primary institutional, financial, and environmental challenges causing work-life conflict among women vendors.
- To investigate the presence and effectiveness of existing informal safety nets, familial support systems, and community groups.
- To formulate actionable, data-backed policy suggestions and structural recommendations to improve market infrastructures and elevate the quality of life for women fishmongers.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Scope & Geographical Domain

The geographical boundaries of this study were strictly confined to major retail fish markets within the municipal limits of Mangalore city, Karnataka, India (including Central Market, State Bank area, Urwa Market, and Jeppu Market). This region provides an ideal context due to its deep historical ties to the marine economy and its prominent, long-standing community of women vendors.

### Sampling Architecture

The sample size for this empirical investigation comprises active women fishmongers selected directly from the identified local markets. To ensure a representative distribution reflecting various age, marital statuses, and business scales, a convenient random sampling approach was deployed during primary data collection cycles.

## Data Collection Channels

The research incorporates a dual-source methodology to ensure thorough data validation:

- **Primary Data:** Obtained directly from 30 respondents through structured questionnaires, personalized interview schedules conducted in local languages (Tulu/Kannada), and non-participant market observations.
- **Secondary Data:** Obtained from newspapers, journals and related websites

## Methodological Limitations

The findings of this empirical research are subject to the following structural limitations:

1. The localized focus on the urban coastal context of Mangalore city limits the immediate generalizability of findings to inland or fundamentally different cultural trading sectors.
2. Self-reported data remains subject to cognitive recall variations, especially regarding estimated monthly income and working hour metrics.
3. Varying seasonal patterns in fish landings significantly shift market dynamics, causing responses to vary based on whether data collection occurred during peak or lean fishing seasons.

## IV. DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic and Socio-Economic Stratification

Field data indicates that a major portion of women fishmongers fall within the middle to senior age cohorts (35–60 years), indicating that this traditional profession requires substantial market experience and long-term commitment. In terms of family structure, a strong majority operate within joint or extended family households, which deeply influences their domestic time allocation. Financially, the vast majority are embedded within low-to-middle income groups, with a substantial portion of their earnings directly allocated to immediate household survival, healthcare, and educational expenses for their children.

Table 4.1: Conceptual Socio-Economic Stratification Core Profile

SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLE	DOMINANT STRUCTURAL TRENDS OBSERVED	OPERATIONAL IMPACT ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE
<b>Age Distribution</b>	Concentrated predominantly between 35 and 55 years	Increased vulnerability to physical fatigue and long-term health complications.
<b>Marital Status</b>	High percentage of married, widowed, or sole breadwinners	Substantial dependency ratios requiring immediate and consistent daily income.
<b>Average Working Hours</b>	Varying between 10 to 14 hours daily (early dock arrivals)	Severe limitation of available personal and domestic care time.
<b>Household Structure</b>	Prevalence of joint and large nuclear families	Dual demands: increased household chore load balanced against shared child-care support.

## Analysis of Primary Work-Life Balance Stressors

The empirical data highlights several critical stress vectors that disrupt the work-life balance of women fishmongers. The primary institutional stressor is the prolonged duration of the working day. Vendors routinely arrive at wholesale docks as early as 4:30 AM to secure quality stock and continue retailing until late evening. This leaves minimal time for resting, recovery, or personal care. Secondly, Environmental hazards within municipal markets including inadequate waste disposal systems, poor ventilation, and the absence of clean, separate sanitation facilities—significantly increase physical strain and health concerns.

Financially, the lack of formal banking channels and institutional credit forced many vendors to rely on informal local moneylenders, introducing high interest strains that worsen psychological stress. Domestically, the study confirms that despite working equal or longer hours than male family members, women fishmongers continue to bear the primary burden of unpaid household chores. This uneven distribution of labor results in chronic physical exhaustion and psychological burnout.

## Resilience Vectors and Coping Mechanisms

Despite these extensive pressures, the study identifies robust resilience networks among the respondents. Localized community associations and self-help groups (SHGs) provide critical mutual aid, informal microcredit access, and collective bargaining power within the markets. Furthermore, help from older children or female relatives in managing household responsibilities emerged as a vital coping mechanism, directly absorbing some of the domestic pressures and allowing these women to sustain their commercial livelihoods.

## V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary of Key Findings

First, women fishmongers experience severe time poverty, driven by daily working schedules extending up to 14 hours, which leaves insufficient time for domestic duties and physical recovery. Second, poor infrastructure in traditional marketplaces—specifically the lack of hygienic rest spaces, running water, and clean toilets—directly worsens health issues and increases occupational stress. Third, while family assistance acts as a key support network, rigid cultural norms prevent a fair reallocation of domestic responsibilities, meaning women remain primary caretakers alongside their full-time commercial work.

### Strategic and Policy Recommendations

**Municipal Market Infrastructure Upgrades:** The local municipal corporation should prioritize installing modern, clean sanitation facilities, clean drinking water systems, and properly ventilated seating arrangements within traditional fish markets. Establishing affordable, secure day-care facilities near major markets would also directly alleviate childcare stresses for younger mothers.

**Institutional Financial Inclusion Paths:** Government banking agencies should launch dedicated micro-credit programs and simple working capital loans tailored for informal women traders. This initiative would help eliminate dependence on high-interest informal moneylenders and significantly reduce financial anxiety.

**Formal Welfare Support Networks:** Setting up state-backed fisheries cooperative welfare boards explicitly for women vendors would ensure reliable access to health insurance, occupational therapy, and retirement pensions, building a vital social safety net for these workers.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the work-life balance of women fishmongers in Mangalore city is shaped by a complex interplay of long working hours, infrastructure challenges, and deeply ingrained socio-cultural responsibilities. While these women display remarkable resilience and resourcefulness, the absence of structural protections and basic amenities places an unsustainable burden on their physical and psychological health. Recognizing their vital contributions to the coastal economy, it is essential that municipal bodies and policymakers move beyond viewing fish vending solely as a traditional trade and actively implement targeted welfare and infrastructure supports. Improving their working conditions and economic security will directly strengthen the resilience of coastal communities and promote a more inclusive urban economy.

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