

# Implications of Safe Street Foods in Dhaka City: An Opinion

## ABSTRACT

Street foods play an important role in large group of economic people in the Dhaka city. And it is also the major source of income for floating vendors. Huge numbers of vendors sell dishes, snacks, fruits, and beverages in the megacity of Dhaka. The objective of this article is to promote and maintain the hygienic environment of selling street foods among vendors in Dhaka city. Contaminated foods cause various kinds of diarrheal diseases. To prevent this contagious disease food safety needs much more awareness. To ascertain safe street foods, the government and non-government organizations should implement rules and regulations strictly and appropriate programmes should be conducted.

**Short Title:** Street foods in Dhaka city

**Key words:** Street food, Hygienic environment, Food safety, Contamination, Diarrheal diseases,

## INTRODUCTION

Street foods are ready-to-eat food or drinks sold by a hawker or vendor in a street or other public places such as at a market or fair [1]. Street food vendors are a common sight in many parts of the world. They are present in virtually every larger city in the global south and play an integral role in the daily life of millions of people [2]. Street food constitutes up to 40% of the daily diet of urban consumers in the developing world. Street food is generally cheap, prepared in a minute, and mostly no comfortable eating area and facilities provided. This means the food has to be enjoyed either by standing next to the stall or sit at the limited chair and sometimes, some vendors provide the table for their customers or the most suitable way to enjoy street food is simply to eat it while walking. Globalization and urban development threaten these age-old traditions and, despite street food's vital importance to local communities, there are serious health issues to contend with [3]. Some might say street food can bring a negative impact to our health, because of the location of the stall whereby the food served at the stall easily exposed to biological hazards and more. We believe that this contention cannot be rejected yet the fact that street food normally associated with unhealthy situation. It has become the issue that built up the obstacle for the sustainability of the street food culture all over the world.

Now that the population of Bangladesh is rapidly growing, street foods play an important role in the diets of Bangladeshi people. But poor hygiene causes high level of contamination of foods and enhances the health risk of consumers. Bangladesh is a populous country and Dhaka is the most populated city in Bangladesh. The greater Dhaka area has a population of over 22 million as of 2022, with a density of 23,234 people per square kilometer within a total area of 300 square kilometers. It is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Most of the urban people living in the capital city as well as people come from outside do their floating business daily. There are more than 3,00,000 street vendors who are delivering the street foods to millions of customers living in Dhaka city [4]. Day by day the city is developing and this development has led to an increase in the demand for relatively inexpensive and ready-to-eat foods, as many urban residents spend most of the day outside of their house. They do not have

enough time and money to spend on foods. For this reason, street food-vending is now an important business. Street vendors provide an essential service to factory, construction and official workers, shoppers, persons in transit, persons with low income and others by selling complete meals, refreshments and snacks at a relatively low price without delay for preparation [5].

There are various types of street foods available in Bangladesh. Such as Chola-boot (chickpeas), Bhel puri (puffed rice with potatoes), samucha (deep-fried dough stuffed with vegetables and or meat). Other popular snacks are ghugni (boiled with mashed white peas with spices), singara (flours wraps stuffed with vegetables, spices, and occasional liver), pakora (mixed with lentils, onions and other spices) and different types of cake [6]. Also the vendors sell out poor dairy farm products (like qulfi, frozen dessert, etc), with poor and unhealthy colors and flavors. Such products are unhealthy, even dangerous and typically may cause malignant neoplastic diseases, especially artificial colors and flavors. There are different street things like colored sweet water poured on the ice ball (ice gola) are terribly dangerous, without any nutrient and unhealthy. These types of foods are available on the street in Dhaka city. But the question is whether these foods are made in a hygienic environment or not. Contaminated foods are very harmful to health. Several types of fatal diseases are the source of unhygienic street foods. Several factors are behind this contamination. In the microbiological perspective, some pathogenic microorganisms are responsible for causing food borne illnesses such as cholera, typhoid, diarrhea, jaundice, etc. These diseases are transmitted through direct contact or cross-contamination. The serving utensils used at the vending site are often contaminated with *Micrococcus spp.* and *Staphylococcus spp.* in general. These microorganisms may have originated from the vendors hands when they touched the food preparation areas, dishcloths or the water during dish washing. These clearly indicate cross contamination between dish water, food preparation surfaces and the food itself [6, 7]. However due to lack of guidance and knowledge of food safety, street foods are prepared under the unhygienic conditions by the food handlers. Street food increases risk of development of food borne illnesses such as diarrhoeal diseases, other food borne illnesses and waterborne diseases, which is due to food contamination through the microorganisms [8]. The main reason for nutritional problems with street foods is expounded to the chronic non-communicable diseases. Street foods are nutritionally rich sources of carbohydrates, sugar, salt, Trans fat and saturated fats. Thus, eating street foods may increase the chances of chronic non-communicable diseases resulting in development of obesity, hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases [8].



**Figure -1:** Peyaju, Beguni, and Chop—Traditional Bangladeshi Food [9].



**Figure -2:** Jhalmuri—A Favorite Dhaka Street Food [9].



**Figure -3:** Halim-A Staple Bangladeshi Food [9].



**Figure -4:** Fruit Juice & Local Bangladeshi Fruits [9].

In our opinion, unhygienic environment in which these foods are prepared, stored, **improperly handled**, preparation practice and unawareness are key factors for unsafe street foods. Street foods vendors generally prepare these foods in bare hands. They usually do not know how to maintain a hygienic environment to prepare foods. Germs are easily **passed** to what they have on offer. The vehicle used for transport should be clean and should not carry animals, toxic substances or **contaminated** materials along with the prepared foods, unless equipped with a structural barrier to prevent cross-contamination. Another most important factor for contamination is purity of water also used for preparing foods and to clean cooking and eating utensils and sometimes, even the swab cloths used for drying are other sources of cross-

contamination. Vendors sell their food in open air and they do not often cover these foods properly or kept uncovered for long. Germs from other sources can easily be transmitted and contaminate ready foods.

In order to improve the conditions of street food vendors and to create certain that the foods sold-out do not jeopardize public health and respect certain quality standards, the first and foremost requirements to make the notice that food ought to be of a precise quality [9]. Preparation and processing is a critical area in the series of steps to which foods are subjected before their sale and consumption and are important in determining the safety of food. In several areas where street foods are sold-out, issues of safety are not taken into consideration neither on the producer nor on the buyer side. Vendors have a very tiny margin for profit and are incentivized to keep expenses low by utilizing cheaper ingredients and irrespective pricey sanitary practices.

Several measures may address the food safety issues of the road food sector in Bangladesh. The Government ought to formulate realistic laws, rules and regulations on street-food hawking, establish adequate infrastructure facilities and develop plans of action for implementation on street food hawking. Currently, food laws and regulation do not offer any specific standards with those vendors to abide by and to hold out their activity. However, rules and laws alone do not seem to be enough [10]. Food safety and internal control measures got to be reinforced as an example through regular inspections. There is conjointly a requirement to coach street food vendors on correct food handling and preparation, protecting show and safe storage. Food vendors should either sanitize eating and drinking utensils between uses or use disposable utensils (preferably recyclable or biodegradable) wherever possible. Vendors must be aware of hygiene and sanitation aspects of street food vending and consumption. Committees should be established in order to educate vendors and help street vendors to assimilate into the urban food supply chain in the safest and most efficient way possible. Several studies were done in some countries including South Africa looking at the operation from various perspectives including hygiene practices and small business. Employment creation has become a national imperative of the country and small business development was seen as a significant component to employment creation, establishing the global practices in street food vending from a hygiene perspective and its relevance to the South African context [11, 12]. One such example is the India's Food Safety and Standards Authority which was established in order to deliver training for people who are actively involved or intend to get involved in preparing food for public consumption as well as promote general awareness about food safety and food standards. [13]. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), local governments, international organizations and consumer groups are becoming aware of the socioeconomic relevance of street foods as well as the risks associated with them [14]. Food safety is the primary concern, but other issues were also raised such as sanitation (waste accumulation in the streets and clogged wastewater drains), traffic congestion in the city, including for pedestrians (occupation of sidewalks by street vendors and traffic accidents), illegal occupation of public or private spaces and social issues (child labor, unfair competition to formal trade, etc.) [14, 15].

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, personal hygiene and health of the vendors are one in all the keys to safe street food hawking. Experiences from Asian country like Singapore highlight the mandatory element of a comprehensive reform package that addresses enhancement of street food regulation and the selection of adequate social control mechanisms. It also highlights the development of necessary

infrastructure like street food selling instrumentality, coaching tools and clean water facilities. Asian countries ought to use lessons learnt in neighboring countries to reform the road foods improving and ensuring their safety effectively. In Bangladesh, several measures may address the food safety issues of the road food sector. The Government of Bangladesh ought to formulate realistic laws, rules and regulations on street-food hawking, establish adequate infrastructure facilities and develop plans of action for implementation on street food hawking thus maintain public health.

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