

Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities and Crisis Factors In Tamil Nadu's Handloom Sector: Implications for Weaver Well-Being and Industry Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the socio-economic conditions and factors of crisis affecting the handloom weavers of Tamil Nadu, with specific attention being paid to their impact on social well-being and sustainability of the industry. By surveying 1,000 weavers from the five leading handloom hubs, the research points to considerable differences in socio-economic conditions by age, gender and marital status. Socio-economic attributes exhibit a positive impact on well-being, whereas crisis variables like access to finance and market access negatively affect well-being. Membership in cooperatives and other sources of income are revealed to improve participants' economic status whereas gender inequality is not a significant contributor to the socio-economic outcomes. The paper highlights the importance of policy responses to strengthen cooperatives, boost market linkages and respond to occupation-related health risks. Incorporating statistical analyses, this study contributes to finding sustainable solutions for the handloom sector while improving the livelihoods of weavers and safeguarding the traditional craft in the years to come.

Keywords: Handloom weaver, socio-economic conditions, crisis factors, social well-being, cooperative societies, market access, occupational health, Tamil Nadu.

1. INTRODUCTION

The handloom weaving community plays a more significant role in shaping Tamil Nadu's cultural and economic landscape as a major source of livelihood for many artisans (Kumudha, 2013; Suresh & Mahadevan, 2020). With a rich heritage and an obvious economic importance, the industry faces issues that must be addressed if it's to have longevity. Weavers remain economically as well as socially exiled in the changing economic contexts, owing not only to the nature of these new market interventions, but also to ineffective financial support and the new mechanization process. (Rajendran et al., 2015). Therefore, these challenges require a better understanding of the structural and economic conditions that impact the well-being of weaving communities.

This study seeks to go beyond earlier work and analyse handloom weavers' socio-economic conditions, specifically looking at factors resulting in crisis in the industry and their effects on social well-being. Prior research has identified that survivors often struggle with low-income status, lack financial independence, and suffer from work-related health issues (Venugopal et al., 2023; Murthy et al., 2002; Garcia & Wong, 2016). This study addresses a crucial reflection void by providing a comprehensive evaluation of the extent to which the intersection of societal and economic forces and industry crises lead to a generalised job dissatisfaction among weavers and how weavers cope with exactly the socio-economic conditions instigated by these forces. The work has focused on the social hierarchies and financial insecurities that permeate the industry, as well as on how the cooperatives impact the sustainability of the industry, its viability (Panda & Bhuwania, 2022; Mishra & Mahopatra 2019). The study is based on a survey-based methodology, and the data was collected from seven of the largest handloom hubs in Tamil Nadu, including Kancheepuram, Erode-Bhavani, Madurai, Coimbatore and Salem. To quantify the associations between the socio-economic conditions, crisis factors, and social well-being, the study employs statistical models, including regression, chi-square tests, and cross-tabulations. The assessments of the level of influence of socio-economic context on crisis factors, and social well-being come from regression analysis, while relations between categorical variables are

examined by chi-square tests. Cross-tabulations enable further exploration of the impact of social hierarchies and barriers on market access vis-a-vis other socio-economic variables. The socio-economic conditions have a positive impact on social well-being, while the crisis factors have a negative impact on the level of well-being and satisfaction of service and health entrepreneurs, who are the fabricators of the fabric. (Koiri, 2020; Jeeva, 2022). In addition, access to cooperative institution and financial resources help reduces some of these negative impacts (Karthikeyan & Balasubramanian, 2018).

Exploitation and marginalisation with their limitingly adverse living condition, are common in domestic and international garment supply chain; In doing so, this paper adds to the body of work related to socio-economic vulnerability and the challenges noticeable in the fabric sector, particularly factoring in their structural aspect. The study aims to arm policymakers and industry stakeholders with actionable insights by identifying the key determinants of well-being as well as those of industry sustainability. The end objective is to recommend interventions in policy that are beneficial regarding financially obtaining handloom weavers of Tamil Nadu and ensuring their socio-economic status (Damodar, 2019; Sharma & Chandra, 2021) so that this traditional process lasts to the generations to come.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The data-driven approach provides a more accurate picture before formulating policy; the handloom sector in Tamil Nadu is a well-researched sector, with studies highlighting its socio-economic importance and the challenges faced by the industry, and the implications for policy. This section addresses the existing literature in an orderly manner, like a funnel from a broader theme to a specific research gap. Handloom weaving remains an important source of livelihood but is plagued by socio-economic challenges. Studies show that financial instability, low wages, and dependence on intermediaries' compound weavers' vulnerabilities (Kumudha, 2013; Suresh & Mahadevan, 2020; Rajendran et al., 2015). Earnings are substantially lower than those in mechanized sectors, contributing to economic insecurity (Murthy et al., 2002). These gender disparities are further echoed in wage gaps and lack of agency among the women weavers, who comprise a significant portion of the workforce (Garcia & Wong, 2016; Veena, 2024; Gupta & Chatterjee, 2016).

The handloom sector has historically found it difficult to compete against power looms and mass-produced textiles which are more affordable, leading to the decline of this sector (Jain & Gera, 2017; Singh & Rao, 2017). Traditional handloom enterprises are often not sustainable due to poor marketing strategies and lack of direct access to the market (Bharat Singh, 2014; Goswami & Jain, 2014). The awareness amongst consumers about the utility of handloom products does not always transform into rise in earnings of weavers owing to poor market linkages (Anusuya & Chinnadorai, 2015). One potential solution is the use of digital platforms and innovative marketing interventions (Sadanandam, 2016; Srivastava, 2019).

These ailments include musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory diseases, and hearing impairments due to poor ergonomics and prolonged exposure to old and outdated tools (Koiri, 2020; Jeeva, 2022) owing to the physically demanding processes in handloom weaving. The ergonomics interventions and policy driven health initiatives are still lacking (Carr, 2004; Sathiya Bama, 2019) and workplace safety standards (in India) are grossly inadequate (Sathiya Bama, 2019). There is government welfare use existing is implemented ineffectively, not making any significant impact in improving working condition (Padmini, 2020; Faruque, 2021). The handloom sector in Tamil Nadu has been a focus of extensive study, which highlights its socio-economic significance, challenges for the industry and policy implications. This section constructs a funnel of relevant studies, moving, step-by-step, logically up the funnel of synthesising the existing literature and pointing out research gaps.

Though handloom weaving continues to be a major source of livelihood, its socio-economic issues are still not dealt with. Studies show that the vulnerabilities of weavers are accentuated by financial instability, low wages, and dependence on intermediaries (Kumudha, 2013; Suresh & Mahadevan, 2020; Rajendran et al. 2015). Compared to mechanized sectors, pay is still much lower contributing to economic insecurity (Murthy et al., 2002). Gender terms further exacerbate socio-economic conditions, as women artisans face widespread wage gaps and low agency in decision-making despite comprising over half the sector's workforce (Garcia & Wong, 2016; Veena, 2024; Gupta & Chatterjee, 2016). This study aims to bridge this gap by integrating statistical analyses to explore these interdependencies and propose targeted policy recommendations for a more resilient handloom sector.

2.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

2.1.1 Research Objectives

- To assess the socio-economic conditions of handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu concerning demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and income levels.
- To analyse the key elements contributing to the crisis in the handloom industry, including financial constraints, market access challenges, and cooperative dependencies.
- To examine the impact of socio-economic conditions and crisis factors on the social well-being of weavers.
- To evaluate the role of cooperatives and government interventions in improving financial stability and market accessibility for weavers.
- To explore the correlation between social hierarchies, financial insecurities, and overall professional satisfaction in the weaving community.
- To identify gender-based and age-related disparities in socio-economic conditions, crisis factors, and well-being outcomes among handloom weavers.

2.1.2 Research Hypotheses

- H1: There exists a considerable difference in socio-economic conditions among handloom weavers in relation to the age and gender.
- H2: Financial stability and social well-being were higher for weavers with marriages than for those without.
- H3: The crisis factors of the handloom sector can be influenced greatly by the socio-economic conditions.
- H4: Socio-economic conditions directly positively influence the social well-being of handloom weavers.
- H5: Crisis factors negatively impact the social well-being of handloom weavers.
- H6: Weavers linked with cooperative societies are more financially stable and have better access to the market than independent weavers.
- H7: There are no gender-related differences in terms of socio-economic conditions, perception of crisis or social well-being.
- H8: Weavers with other sources of income show less favourable socio-economic outcomes relative to weavers who rely solely on weaving.
- H9: Social hierarchies in the handloom weaving community positively impact the financial security and market opportunities.

The analytical structure of this study is hence closely aligned with the research objectives and hypotheses, ensuring a systematic analysis of the relationships of socio-economic conditions, crisis constructs, and social well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional research design to examine the socio-economic status, causes of crisis and social well-being of handloom weavers of Tamil Nadu. The research provides a comprehensive overview of the industry challenges by using mixed methods.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The study covers five districts with a history of weaving communities: Kancheepuram, Erode-Bhavani, Coimbatore, Salem and Thirubuvanam. Through a convenience and snowball sampling method, all those who met the study's inclusion criteria were number until a total of one thousand handloom weavers were selected from different segments of the demographic category.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire that included demographic data, social structure, economic conditions, crisis factors, and social well-being. The survey included Likert-scale questions on subjective well-being and financial stability as well.

3.4 Data Analysis

Statistical methods of regression analysis, chi-square tests, and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the collected data. They were applied to associate socio-economic conditions, crisis elements and social well-being.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All participants gave informed consent, and they were treated confidentially and ethically in accordance with the research ethics protocols. Anonymity and Participation II The study preserved anonymity and voluntary participation during the data collection process.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the statistical analysis results related to the research aims and hypothesis. Employed descriptive statistics, chi-square test, regression analysis, and cross tabulations, the study attempts to explore the impact of socio-economic conditions, crisis factors on social well-being of handloom weavers.

5.1 Socio-Economic Conditions of Handloom Weavers

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 25	45	5.6%
	26-35	24	3.0%
	36-45	143	17.9%
	46-55	272	34.0%
	Above 55	316	39.5%
Gender	Male	480	60.0%
	Female	318	39.8%
Marital Status	Married	785	98.1%
	Unmarried	9	1.1%
Income	Below ₹6,000	411	51.4%
	₹6,001-₹15,000	375	46.9%
	₹15,001-₹25,000	9	1.1%
	Above ₹25,000	4	0.5%

The table shows how the respondents are demographic age, gender, status, and income levels. A significant portion of weavers (39.5%) is above 55 years old reflecting the aging workforce. The gender ratio indicates that most of the weaver population are male (60%) while the others are female (39.8%). Marital status reveals that 98.1% of respondents are married, suggesting that marital status may play a significant role in socio-economic stability. Income levels are predominantly low, with 51.4% earning below ₹6,000 per month, reflecting widespread financial insecurity. These findings align with prior studies that highlight the economic vulnerabilities of handloom weavers (Kumudha, 2013; Rajendran et al., 2015). The results confirm H1, indicating significant socio-economic variations among handloom weavers based on age and gender.

5.2 Marital Status and Financial Stability

Table 2: Chi-Square Test - Marital Status and Financial Stability

Variable	Pearson Chi-Square	df	p-Value
Marital Status vs Financial Stability	52.551	1	0.000

As indicated by the chi-square test results ($\chi^2 = 52.551$, $p < 0.001$), a significant association exists between the two variables, marital status and financial stability. Households with two incomes will be more financially stable than

one-unit households, which can be a reason for married weavers to be more financially stable than unmarried weavers. This finding also concurs with hypothesis (H2) about the significance of marital status in explaining financial well-being as previous research have highlighted the importance of family structures in understanding economic resilience (Garcia & Wong, 2016; Veena, 2024). This means that married weavers are significantly more financially stable than unmarried weavers, thus confirming H2.

5.3 Regression Analysis: Socio-Economic and Crisis Factors Impact on Social Well-Being

Table 3: Regression Model - Social Well-Being of Weavers

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-Value	p-Value
(Constant)	30.007	5.629	-	5.330	0.000
Socio-Economic Factors	0.338	0.035	0.377	9.624	0.000
Crisis Factors	-0.166	0.065	-0.100	-2.560	0.011

The results of the basic regression analysis show a strong positive effect of socio-economic factors ($\beta = 0.377$, $p < 0.001$) and a negative effect from crisis factors ($\beta = -0.100$, $p = 0.011$) on well-being. All predictors combined explain a large portion of the variance of social well-being, the most significant being socio-economic conditions. Such findings further back up hypotheses H3, H4, and H5, as they affirm socio-economic circumstances cushions the effects of crisis, whereas crisis conditions aggravate well-being challenges. The above results were consistent with Koiri (2020) and Jeeva (2022), who stress the role of both socio-economic stability and crisis factors in weaver life. The analysis provides support for H3, as socio-economic conditions significantly influence the crisis factors in the handloom sector. H4 is also supported since socio-economic factors have a positive effect on social well-being. The negative beta coefficient for crisis factors supports H5, suggesting a negative effect on social well-being.

5.4 Cooperative Membership and Financial Stability

Table 4: Chi-Square Test - Cooperative Membership and Financial Stability

Variable	Pearson Chi-Square	df	p-Value
Cooperative Membership * Financial Stability	122.399	26	0.000

A chi-square ($\chi^2 = 122.399$, $p < 0.001$) shows a significant relationship between cooperative membership and stability on financial issues. Weavers affiliated with cooperatives are financially better off as they have access to collective resources and marketing strategies, and they share financial burdens. This confirms hypothesis H6 and is in congruence with various studies indicating that cooperatives help in increasing the livelihood of the weavers (Karthikeyan & Balasubramanian, 2018; Panda & Bhuwania, 2022). The results support H6, indicating that cooperative weavers are significantly more financially stable compared to independent weavers.

5.5 Gender Differences in Socio-Economic Factors

Table 5: T-Test - Gender and Socio-Economic Factors

Variable	t-Value	p-Value	Interpretation
Gender - Socio-Economic Factors	0.438	0.662	No significant difference

Gender-based differences in socio-economic conditions and well-being are not statistically significant, as shown by the t-test results ($t = 0.438$, $p = 0.662$). This indicates that male and female weavers encounter similar challenges unlike earlier studies which emphasized gender divide in the handloom industry (Garcia & Wong, 2016; Veena, 2024). Such a finding validates hypothesis H7 and indicates that gender-neutral policies can also prove equally

effective in targeting such socio-economic vulnerabilities. The results would also confirm option H7 as gender does not significantly influence socio-economic condition or well-being.

5.6 Additional Sources of Income and Socio-Economic Outcomes

Table 6: T-Test - Additional Income Source and Socio-Economic Conditions

Variable	t-Value	p-Value	Interpretation
Additional Income Source - Socio-Economic Conditions	-2.070	0.039	Significant difference

The t-test ($t = -2.070$, $p = 0.039$) shows a significant difference of socio-economic outcomes among weavers with additional income and the weavers who have only weavers as income earning activity. This underscores the significance of diversified livelihood to cope up with the sudden financial crunch. This reinforces hypothesis H8 and is in line with previous studies advocating for alternate means of generating income as a way to promote and sustain weavers' resilience (Murthy et al., 2002; Sharma & Chandra, 2021). As expected, the results support H8 that weavers who have other income sources show better socio-economic condition compared to the weavers who depend only on weaving.

Findings

The study shows that there are considerable socio-economic differences among handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu, with age and gender being critical determinants of their financial condition and prosperity. Socio-economic variables enhance social well-being (H1, H2, H4), and married weavers are more fiscally stable than unmarried weavers. However, crisis factors like financial constraints and market access challenges reduces well-being (H5). Membership in a cooperative emerges and plays a critical role in enhancing financial stability and market access, confirming weavers linked to cooperatives outperform independent weavers (H6). Interesting finding is that gender has no substantial impact on socio-economic conditions or well-being, leading us to believe that both male and female weavers are equally hard done by (H7). Weavers with alternative sources of income have also better socio-economic outcomes, emphasising the need for diversified livelihoods (H8).

Suggestions

To analyse the practical challenges of Handloom weavers, policymakers must focus on the rapid development of these cooperative models for timely financial assistance and access to better market (Karthikeyan & Balasubramanian, 2018; Panda & Bhuwania, 2022). Due to the long-standing physical health and well-being of weavers affected by poor working conditions, immediate ergonomic interventions and health initiatives must be implemented to reduce the occupational health risks (Koiri, 2020; Jeeva, 2022). Moreover, digital platforms and innovative marketing strategies must be used to raise consumer awareness and improve market linkages, helping weavers to earn more (Sadanandam, 2016; Srivastava, 2019). According to Garcia & Wong (2016) and Veena (2024), gender-sensitive policies are essential in order to tackle wage gaps and to empower women weavers, who make up a large section of the workforce.

Research Implications

This study, therefore contributes to the body of literature by providing an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic conditions, crisis factors and social well-being experienced by handloom weavers. This highlights the need for an integrated approach that can address the systemic issues the sector is facing, including financial loss, market competitiveness and occupational health threats (Rajendran et al., 2015; Murthy et al., 2002; Koiri, 2020). The results highlight the importance of cooperative societies and policy interventions in preserving the handloom industry, but they also call for further research to better understand how social hierarchies and gender dynamics impact the livelihoods of these communities (Panda & Bhuwania, 2022; Gupta & Chatterjee, 2016; Garcia & Wong, 2016). At the same time, the study identifies digital platforms and marketing strategies as prominent opportunities to enhance market linkages and add income to weavers' livelihoods, suggesting future studies exploring the effectiveness of these tools (Sadanandam, 2016; Srivastava, 2019; Jeeva, 2022).

Conclusion

Handloom weaving sector in Tamil Nadu contributes extensively to both preservation of culture and boosting economy, however, the industry is facing multiple challenges which can threaten its sustainability. This study

identifies specific socio-economic and crisis-related factors that are important for the well-being of weavers, indicating the areas where targeted policy measures are needed. By building cooperatives, diversifying markets, and promoting occupational health and safety, stakeholders can safeguard the future of this traditional craft. The results also emphasize the role of multiple income sources and gender-sensitive policies for improving weavers' socio-economic outcomes. The road ahead for the handloom sector in Tamil Nadu, the second largest employer after agriculture is to continue a multi-pronged approach to ensure both the survival of artisans and the survival of culture.

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