



## A study on weavers' perceptions and economic challenges in the handloom production system of Tamil Nadu

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The goal of this research is to examine weavers' opinions and the economic challenges they face in the handloom production system in Tamil Nadu. The study explores how factors such as rising production costs, limited access to finance, outdated technology and government policies affects the sustainability of handloom activities. It also aims to better understand weavers' working conditions, their perspectives on industry developments, and the socio-economic constraints that impact their livelihoods.

**Designs/methodology/approach:** The study adopts an exploratory and descriptive research design. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and personal interviews with handloom weavers and other stakeholders in key weaving clusters of Tamil Nadu including Kanchipuram, Salem, Madurai, and Erode. To ensure representativeness a stratified random sampling method was used. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, academic journals and textile industry publications. Quantitative data were analysed using statistical methods, while qualitative data were interpreted thematically to identify common patterns and insights.

**Findings:** The study reveals that handloom weavers face severe economic challenges such as fluctuating raw material costs, low and irregular income and limited access to institutional finance. The presence of middlemen reduces profit margins, while a lack of modernization and market access further decreases efficiency. In addition, job insecurity and declining interest among younger generations make the sector more vulnerable. The study suggests that increasing awareness of government programs strengthening cooperative societies, and promoting direct market access can help improve income and sustainability.

**Keywords:** Weavers, traditional weaving, textile economy, socio-economic conditions, market access, government schemes

### Introduction

The handloom production method is an essential aspect of India's traditional textile industry providing work for many rural and semi-urban weavers in Tamil Nadu. The sector is well-known for its rich cultural legacy skilled workmanship and economic impact. However, handloom weavers confront a number of economic issues, including increased raw material costs, poor and inconsistent income and fierce competition from power looms and sophisticated textile factories. Limited access to institutional capital, out-of-date technology and reliance on middlemen all diminish their revenues and efficiency. Furthermore, job insecurity and dwindling enthusiasm among younger generations increase the sector's vulnerability. Understanding weavers' perceptions is critical to identifying the major concerns influencing their livelihoods.

**Weavers:** Weavers are the backbone of the handloom business, helping to preserve traditional techniques and create unique materials. The majority of weavers come from rural villages and rely on weaving for a living. Despite their contributions they frequently suffer low wages, substandard working conditions and limited access to modern facilities.

### Traditional Weaving

Weavers are the backbone of the handloom business helping to produce traditional and high-quality textiles. They have particular skills which are frequently passed down through generations. Most weavers live in rural areas and rely on weaving for their major source of income. Their work makes a vital contribution to the preservation of Indian

cultural heritage. However, many weavers struggle financially due to poor pay and sporadic income. Poor working conditions and a lack of social security further jeopardize their income. Limited access to contemporary technologies and markets also limits their expansion. Despite their importance their contributions are sometimes underappreciated. As a result enhancing weavers' well-being is critical to the handloom industry's sustainability.

### Socio-Economic Conditions

Weavers' socioeconomic situations influence their quality of life and financial security. Many weavers have modest incomes, little education and little access to healthcare. These problems have an impact on their current standard of living and future opportunities. Social factors such as family background and job security can have an impact. Economic insecurity frequently pushes weavers to seek alternative employment. Their condition is exacerbated by a lack of awareness of social systems. Improving socioeconomic situations is critical for their well-being. Government and institutional support can help to address these concerns. Improving their living standards will benefit the entire handloom industry.

### Market Access

Weavers need market access to sell their crafts and generate a sustainable living. Many weavers rely on middlemen reducing their profit margins. Their limited exposure to larger markets limits their growth potential. Lack of branding and marketing skills has an impact on sales.

However, digital platforms and e-commerce create new opportunities. Direct selling can help weavers reach more clients. Government measures can help improve market links. Improving infrastructure and awareness is also necessary. Improved market access has the potential to considerably enhance weavers' economic conditions.

### Scope of the study

The current study focuses on weavers' perspectives and economic constraints inside Tamil Nadu's handloom production chain. It includes significant handloom centres including Kanchipuram, Salem, Madurai and Erode. The study investigates critical issues such as working conditions, salary levels and access to government benefits. It also looks at concerns including growing raw material costs, poor wages, outmoded technology and reliance on intermediaries. The scope is limited to handloom weavers and small-scale production units, leaving out large-scale textile enterprises and power loom sectors. Individual weavers and members of cooperative societies are thought to receive comprehensive understanding. The study's goal is to identify fundamental challenges and propose practical solutions to help weavers improve their livelihoods. It is limited to the current economic and policy situation. The study's goal is to identify fundamental challenges and propose practical solutions to help weavers improve their livelihoods. It is limited to the current economic and policy situation. The findings are designed to help policymakers, researchers and stakeholders improve the handloom sector.

### Review of Literature

Anitha and Kumar et, al., (2024) <sup>[1]</sup> The researcher examine the effectiveness of government schemes for handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu. The study found that although several welfare programs exist their benefits do not fully reach weavers due to lack of awareness and procedural difficulties. Many weavers face challenges in accessing subsidies and financial assistance. The study highlighted the gap between policy formulation and implementation. It also pointed out that middlemen often influence access to benefits. Training and awareness programs were recommended to improve utilization. Strengthening institutional support was suggested for better outcomes. Effective implementation can significantly improve weavers' economic conditions.

Suresh et, al., (2025) <sup>[2]</sup> This research study's analysed market access and pricing issues in the handloom industry. The study revealed that weavers often receive low returns due to dependence on intermediaries. Lack of branding and marketing skills further reduces their income. The study emphasized the importance of direct market linkages and fair pricing mechanisms. It also suggested the use of digital platforms to improve visibility. Infrastructure support and market information systems were recommended. These measures can enhance competitiveness and profitability. Improved market access is essential for sustaining weavers' livelihoods.

Karthik et, al., (2025) <sup>[3]</sup> This research examined the role of technology adoption in the handloom production system. The study revealed that many weavers still use outdated tools and techniques, which reduces efficiency and output. Limited awareness and high costs prevent the adoption of modern technology. The study suggested introducing low-cost innovations and training programs. It also highlighted

the importance of design development and product diversification. Technological support can improve quality and competitiveness. The study concluded that modernization is essential for sustainability. It can also attract younger generations to the industry.

Raj et, al., (2026) <sup>[4]</sup> The main goal of this study analysed the socio-economic impact of migration among handloom weavers. The study found that due to low income and job insecurity, many weavers migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities. This leads to a decline in traditional weaving practices in rural regions. The study highlighted the loss of skilled labour and cultural knowledge. It emphasized the need for improving local employment opportunities. Government support and better wages can reduce migration. Strengthening rural industries is essential for retaining weavers. This is important for the long-term sustainability of the handloom sector.

Priyanka et, al., (2026) <sup>[5]</sup> examined the impact of marketing strategies on the performance of handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu. The study found that lack of branding, promotion, and product differentiation limits the reach of handloom products in competitive markets. Many weavers are unaware of modern marketing techniques and digital tools. The study highlighted that exhibitions and fairs provide temporary market access but are not sufficient for long-term growth. It suggested the adoption of online platforms and social media marketing. Training programs in branding and packaging were also recommended. Strengthening marketing strategies can improve sales and income levels. Effective marketing is essential for the sustainability of the handloom production system.

### Statement of the Problem

The handloom production system in Tamil Nadu plays an important role in generating employment and conserving ancient weaving traditions although it faces various economic obstacles in the current environment. Weavers frequently have poor and inconsistent revenue increased raw material costs and limited access to credit. Increased competition from power looms and machine-made products has lowered demand for handloom textiles threatening their livelihoods. Furthermore, reliance on middlemen, a lack of contemporary technology, and limited market access all undermine their profitability. Many weavers are also unaware of government projects and work in substandard conditions. These difficulties cause economic volatility and jeopardize the handloom sector's long-term viability, making it critical to investigate weavers' opinions and challenges.

### Objectives

To a Study on Weavers' Perceptions and Economic Challenges in the Handloom Production System of Tamil Nadu

**Ho1:** There is no significant difference between the weavers' level of awareness of government schemes and their income.

### Methodology

The research was conducted by collecting primary data from 200 weavers through a structured interview schedule. The methodology adopted for this study is outlined below

### Study Area and Population

The study, “A Study on Weavers’ Perceptions and Economic Challenges in the Handloom Production System of Tamil Nadu,” focuses on weaver families actively engaged in handloom production. Major handloom clusters such as Kanchipuram, Salem, Madurai, and Erode were included.

### Data Collection Tools

**Primary Data:** A structured interview schedule was used to gather information on demographic details, years of experience, perceptions of income, working conditions, market access

**Secondary Data:** This study were collected from published sources such as books, research articles, journals, government reports, handloom census data, and industry publications. The data helped in understanding the historical, social, and economic context of handloom weaving in Tamil Nadu and supported the analysis of primary data collected from weavers.

### Data Analysis

The present analysis has been carried out on study objective-oriented variables such age, monthly income, awareness of government scheme and so on

**Table 1:** Age Distribution of Weavers

Age Group	Weavers	Percentage
18-30	50	25
31-45	90	45
Above-45	60	30
Total	200	100

(Source: primary data)

Table 1 shows the age distribution of handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu shows that the majority of respondents are in the middle age group. 25% of weavers are in the 18–30 age group, indicating a smaller proportion of younger participants in the handloom industry. The largest segment, 45%, falls in the 31–45 age group, suggesting that middle-aged weavers form the backbone of the workforce. 30% of weavers are above 45 years, representing experienced senior members who contribute significant knowledge and skills to production. Overall, the data indicates that the handloom sector is predominantly supported by middle-aged and experienced weavers, while younger participation remains limited.

**Table 2:** Monthly Income of Weavers

Income Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below - 5,000	25	12.5
5,001 - 10,000	85	42.5
Above -10,000	90	45
Total	200	100

(Source: Primary Data)

The table2 the monthly earnings of handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu show significant variation. Among the respondents, 12.5% fall in the lowest earning group, indicating a small segment facing financial vulnerability. 42.5% belong to the middle earning group, representing moderate earnings that may cover basic needs but limit savings and investment in production. The largest segment,

45%, falls in the highest earning group, reflecting relatively stable and better earnings. Overall, the data indicates that nearly half of the weavers have satisfactory earnings while a significant portion faces economic challenges, highlighting the need for support mechanisms to improve financial stability and productivity in the handloom sector.

**Table 3:** Awareness of Government Schemes

Scheme	Awareness	Percentage
Handloom Subsidy Programs	80	40
Health Insurance Schemes	60	30
Skill Development Programs	35	17.5
Marketing Support Programs	25	12.5
Total	200	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 3 The awareness of government schemes among handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu varies across different programs. Out of 200 respondents, 80 weavers (40%) are aware of Handloom Subsidy Programs, making it the most recognized support initiative. Awareness of Health Insurance Schemes is slightly lower with 60 weavers (30%) reporting familiarity, indicating moderate understanding of social security benefits. Only 35 weavers (17.5%) are aware of Skill Development Programs, highlighting a significant gap in knowledge about training opportunities that could improve their productivity and income. Awareness of Marketing Support Programs is the lowest with just 25 weavers (12.5%) familiar with these initiatives suggesting limited knowledge about schemes that could help expand market access and enhance sales. Overall, the data shows that while some programs particularly subsidies are moderately known there is a pressing need for better outreach and information dissemination to ensure weavers can fully benefit from government support.

**Table 4:** Daily Production of Handloom Weavers

Production Output (Meters/Day)	Weavers	Percentage
Below 10 meters	30	15
10–20 meters	95	47.5
21–30 meters	60	30
Above 30 meters	15	7.5
Total	200	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 4 the daily production of handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu varies significantly among the 200 respondents. Out of these 30 weavers (15%) produce below 10 meters per day indicating a small segment with low productivity. The majority, 95 weavers (47.5%), produce 10–20 meters per day reflecting moderate production levels that likely meet local demand but may limit income growth. A substantial group of 60 weavers (30%) achieves 21–30 meters per day showing relatively high productivity among experienced weavers. Only a small portion, 15 weavers (7.5%), produces above 30 meters per day representing highly productive units with efficient skills or better resources. Overall, the data indicates that while most weavers maintain moderate output, very few reach high production levels highlighting the need for improved skills, technology and resource access to enhance overall efficiency in the handloom production system.

**Table 5: Factors Affecting Handloom Production Efficiency in the Industry**

S.No	Factors	Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Total
1	Lack of skilled labour	18	25	45	70	42	200
		9	12.5	22.5	35	21.5	100
2	Limited access to raw materials	15	30	50	60	45	200
		7.5	15	25	30	22.5	100
3	Frequent breakdown of looms	20	28	48	65	39	200
		10	14	24	32.5	19.5	100
4	Inconsistent work orders / demand	12	24	50	70	44	200
		6	12	25	35	22	100
5	Lack of financial support	22	26	45	60	47	200
		11	13	22.5	30	23	100
6	Poor electricity	18	32	50	60	40	200
		9	16	25	30	20	100
7	Low awareness of government schemes	25	28	45	60	42	200
		12.5	14	22.5	30	21	100

(Source: Primary Data)

Table 5 showing the analysis of factors affecting handloom production efficiency among 200 weavers in Tamil Nadu highlights several critical challenges. Regarding lack of skilled labor, 18 weavers (9%) reported it as not effective, 25 (12.5%) slightly effective, 45 (22.5%) moderately effective, 70 (35%) effective, and 42 (21%) very effective, indicating that a majority perceive it as a significant barrier. For limited access to raw materials, 15 weavers (7.5%) rated it not effective, 30 (15%) slightly effective, 50 (25%) moderately effective, 60 (30%) effective, and 45 (22.5%) very effective, showing that 52.5% face considerable difficulty. Frequent breakdown of looms affected 20 weavers (10%) not effectively, 28 (14%) slightly, 48 (24%) moderately, 65 (32.5%) effectively, and 39 (19.5%) very effectively. In terms of inconsistent work orders and demand, 12 weavers (6%) considered it not effective, 24 (12%) slightly effective, 50 (25%) moderately effective, 70 (35%) effective, and 44 (22%) very effective. For lack of

financial support, 22 weavers (11%) rated it not effective, 26 (13%) slightly effective, 45 (22.5%) moderately effective, 60 (30%) effective, and 47 (23.5%) very effective. Poor electricity supply was reported as not effective by 18 weavers (9%), slightly effective by 32 (16%), moderately effective by 50 (25%), effective by 60 (30%), and very effective by 40 (20%). Finally, low awareness of government schemes was rated not effective by 25 weavers (12.5%), slightly effective by 28 (14%), moderately effective by 45 (22.5%), effective by 60 (30%), and very effective by 42 (21%). Overall, more than 50% of weavers consistently rated these factors as effective or very effective, demonstrating that skill shortages, raw material constraints, loom breakdowns, inconsistent demand, limited financial support, poor electricity, and low scheme awareness are the key barriers affecting production efficiency and economic sustainability in the handloom sector of Tamil Nadu.

**Table 6: ANOVA for Factors Affecting Handloom Production Efficiency in the Industry and Monthly Income for Weavers**

Variables	Income	N	Mean	S.D.	F Value	Sig.
Lack of skilled labour	Below - 5,000	25	3.60	1.12	4.106	0.001*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	4.12	1.20		
	Above -10,000	90	3.29	1.31		
	Total	200	4.07	1.47		
Limited access to raw materials	Below - 5,000	25	3.23	1.20	4.450	0.000*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	3.15	1.63		
	Above -10,000	90	3.02	1.25		
	Total	200	4.19	1.65		
Frequent breakdown of looms	Below - 5,000	25	3.33	1.20	5.056	0.001*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	4.65	1.30		
	Above -10,000	90	3.20	1.55		
	Total	200	3.50	1.56		
Inconsistent work orders / demand	Below - 5,000	25	3.50	1.15	5.420	0.002*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	3.27	1.21		
	Above -10,000	90	3.34	1.25		
	Total	200	3.18	1.62		
Lack of financial support	Below - 5,000	25	3.40	1.46	7.674	0.001*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	3.09	1.20		
	Above -10,000	90	3.51	1.15		
	Total	200	4.00	1.30		
Poor electricity	Below - 5,000	25	4.42	1.20	3.104	0.003*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	4.03	1.28		
	Above -10,000	90	3.29	1.13		
	Total	200	4.08	1.20		
Low awareness of government schemes	Below - 5,000	25	4.44	1.20	5.330	0.001*
	5,001 - 10,000	85	4.12	1.30		
	Above -10,000	90	3.20	1.11		
	Total	200	4.07	1.30		

(Source: Primary Data)

The table 6 ANOVA analysis shows that the mean scores for lack of skilled labour are 3.60, 4.12, and 3.29 with  $F = 4.106$  and  $p = 0.001$ . For limited access to raw materials, the mean values are 3.23, 3.15, and 3.02 with  $F = 4.450$  and  $p = 0.000$ . The mean scores for frequent breakdown of looms are 3.33, 4.65, and 3.20 with  $F = 5.056$  and  $p = 0.001$ . For inconsistent work orders/demand, the mean values are 3.50, 3.27, and 3.34 with  $F = 5.420$  and  $p = 0.002$ . The factor lack of financial support shows mean scores of 3.40, 3.09, and 3.51 with  $F = 7.674$  and  $p = 0.001$ . For poor electricity, the mean values are 4.42, 4.03, and 3.29 with  $F = 3.104$  and  $p = 0.003$ . Finally, low awareness of government schemes has mean scores of 4.44, 4.12, and 3.20 with  $F = 5.330$  and  $p = 0.001$ .

Since all p-values are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected for all factors, indicating a significant difference among income groups.

### Finding

1. The majority of weavers 45% are in the 31–45 age group indicating that the handloom sector relies heavily on middle-aged and experienced workers. This shows that younger generations are less involved which may affect long-term sustainability
2. Most weavers 47.5% produce 10–20 meters per day reflecting moderate productivity while only 7.5% achieve high production above 30 meters. Moderate output suggests limitations in skills technology or resources among most weavers
3. Nearly half of the weavers 45% earn in the highest income group but a significant portion 12.5% face financial vulnerability highlighting income disparities within the workforce. This indicates that some weavers struggle to meet daily needs and invest in improving production
4. Awareness of government support is low with only 40% aware of subsidy programs and 12.5% aware of marketing support initiatives showing the need for better outreach. Limited awareness prevents weavers from fully utilizing available benefits that could improve their economic situation
5. Key barriers affecting production efficiency include lack of skilled labor (56.5%) limited access to raw materials (52.5%) frequent loom breakdowns (52%) inconsistent work orders (57%) and poor electricity supply (50%) emphasizing the need for skill development infrastructure improvement and better support systems. Addressing these issues could enhance productivity income stability and the overall sustainability of the handloom sector in Tamil Nadu

### Suggestions

1. Conduct regular training programs to improve weaving and dyeing skills, especially for younger and less experienced weavers. This will help maintain quality, enhance productivity, and encourage more youth to join the sector.
2. Introduce modern looms and dyeing equipment to increase production efficiency and reduce breakdowns. Upgraded technology can save time, lower costs, and improve overall output.
3. Enhance access to credit, subsidies, and government schemes to help weavers invest in raw materials and

improve working conditions. Financial support will reduce vulnerability and promote economic stability.

4. Organize awareness campaigns about health insurance, skill development, marketing, and subsidy programs. Better knowledge will enable weavers to utilize benefits effectively and improve livelihoods.
5. Ensure reliable electricity and raw material availability while promoting cooperative societies and eco-friendly dyeing techniques. This will stabilize production, reduce operational costs, and improve sustainability in the handloom sector.

### Conclusion

According to the report the handloom sector in Tamil Nadu is predominantly supported by middle-aged and experienced weavers with limited participation from younger generations. Most weavers maintain moderate output levels and about half generate a consistent income although a sizable proportion are financially vulnerable. Awareness of government schemes is low restricting the use of various assistance programs. Key production constraints include a shortage of skilled workers, a scarcity of raw materials frequent loom malfunctions, irregular work orders and insufficient electrical supply. Addressing these difficulties through skill development, technical upgrades, improved infrastructure, financial support, and more government scheme outreach is critical to improving productivity, income stability and the long-term viability of the region's handloom business.

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