

Determinants Of Income Among Handloom Workers In Thiruvananthapuram District Of Kerala State

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ABSTRACT

The handloom sector plays a vital role in providing employment and preserving traditional craftsmanship in India, particularly in Kerala. The present study aims to analyse the determinants of income among handloom workers in Thiruvananthapuram District. The study is based on both primary and secondary data, with primary data collected from 80 handloom workers using a structured questionnaire through simple random sampling. The study adopts descriptive and analytical research design and uses statistical tools such as correlation, ANOVA, F-test, and Garrett ranking technique for data analysis. The findings of the study reveal that income levels of handloom workers are significantly influenced by factors such as education, experience, type of employment, and access to credit. The correlation analysis indicates a positive relationship between income and these variables, with experience having the strongest influence. The ANOVA and F-test results confirm that there is a significant difference in income based on employment type and that the overall model is statistically significant. The Garrett ranking analysis identifies high cost of raw materials, low wages, and lack of market access as the major problems faced by the workers. The study concludes that although the handloom sector provides livelihood opportunities, workers face economic challenges that limit their income potential. Strengthening cooperative societies, improving access to credit, reducing input costs, and enhancing marketing facilities are essential measures to improve the income and sustainability of handloom workers.

Keywords: Handloom workers, Income determinants, Cooperative societies, Kerala, Socio-economic factors

INTRODUCTION

The handloom sector is one of the oldest and most significant cottage industries in India, playing a crucial role in preserving the country's rich cultural heritage while providing employment to millions of rural households. As a labour-intensive and eco-friendly industry, handloom weaving contributes not only to economic development but also to social stability, especially among marginalized and low-income communities. Despite its importance, the sector continues to face numerous challenges that directly influence the income and livelihood of handloom workers.

In Kerala, particularly in Thiruvananthapuram District, the handloom industry has a long-standing tradition and remains an important source of income for many families. The district is known for its skilled artisans who produce high-quality handloom products, reflecting both tradition and craftsmanship. However, handloom workers often experience income instability due to factors such as fluctuating market demand, rising cost of raw materials, limited access to modern technology, inadequate financial support, and competition from power looms and synthetic products.

Income is a key indicator of the economic well-being of handloom workers, and it is influenced by a variety of socio-economic and institutional factors. These include age, education, work experience, access to credit, type of employment (independent or cooperative), availability of government support, and market linkages. Understanding these determinants is essential for designing effective policies and interventions aimed at improving the living standards of handloom workers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Suresh and Balan (2023), in “Socio-Economic Conditions of Handloom Weavers in Rural Kerala,” examined the living and working conditions of handloom workers with a focus on income variability. The study found that most workers face irregular employment opportunities, which directly affects their monthly earnings. Seasonal demand fluctuations and dependency on middlemen were identified as major factors contributing to unstable income. Rising input costs, particularly for yarn and dyes, further reduce profit margins. The research also pointed out that traditional marketing methods limit the reach of handloom products in competitive markets. It emphasized the importance of establishing better market linkages and promoting digital platforms for sales. Adoption of e-commerce and social media marketing was suggested as a way to enhance income opportunities. The study concluded that improving infrastructure, reducing production costs, and strengthening market access can significantly stabilize and increase the income of handloom workers

Prakash and Devi (2023), in “Gender Disparities in Income among Women Handloom Workers,” focused on the economic challenges faced by female workers in the handloom sector. The study highlighted that women constitute a major portion of the workforce but receive comparatively lower wages than their male counterparts. Factors such as limited bargaining power, lack of ownership of looms, and dependence on male family members were identified as key reasons for income disparity. The research also noted that women often engage in part-time work due to household responsibilities, which further limits their earning potential. Lack of access to training and skill development programmes was another major constraint. The study emphasized the need for gender-inclusive policies and equal wage practices. It also suggested that empowering women through education, financial inclusion, and self-help groups can improve their income levels. Overall, the study concluded that addressing gender inequality is essential for enhancing income and livelihood in the handloom sector.

Karthika and Rajan (2022), in “Impact of Cooperative Societies on Handloom Workers’ Income in Kerala,” analysed the role of cooperative societies in supporting handloom workers. The study found that workers associated with cooperatives enjoy relatively stable income compared to independent weavers. Cooperative societies provide essential support such as timely supply of raw materials, assured wages, and access to organized markets. The research highlighted that cooperatives reduce exploitation by intermediaries and ensure fair pricing for products. It also pointed out that cooperative members benefit from government schemes more effectively due to organized representation. However, the study noted certain limitations such as inefficiency in management and lack of modernization in some societies. Despite these challenges, the overall impact of cooperatives on income was found to be positive. The study concluded that strengthening cooperative institutions can play a key role in improving the economic condition of handloom workers.

Manoj and Nair (2022), in “Financial Inclusion and Income Enhancement of Handloom Workers,” examined the relationship between access to financial services and income levels. The study revealed that many handloom workers face difficulties in accessing formal banking services due to lack of documentation and financial literacy. Those who had access to microfinance, bank loans, and self-help groups were able to invest in better tools, raw materials, and production techniques. This resulted in higher productivity and increased income. The study also highlighted that financial inclusion helps workers manage risks and cope with income fluctuations. However, high interest rates and repayment pressures in some informal credit systems were identified as challenges. The research emphasized the need for simplified loan procedures and financial education. It concluded that improving financial inclusion is a critical factor in enhancing income and ensuring sustainable livelihoods for handloom workers.

Thomas and George (2021), in “Impact of COVID-19 on the Handloom Sector in Kerala,” analysed the effects of the pandemic on the income and employment of handloom workers. The study found that lockdowns and restrictions severely disrupted production and supply chains. Closure of markets and decline in tourism significantly reduced the demand for handloom products. As a result, many workers experienced a drastic fall in income and faced financial distress. The research also highlighted that lack of savings and social security made workers highly vulnerable to such external shocks. Some workers shifted to alternative occupations to sustain their livelihood. The study suggested that digital marketing and online sales could help mitigate such risks in the future. It concluded that the handloom sector requires stronger resilience mechanisms and government support to withstand similar crises.

Shaji and Mathew (2021), in “Marketing Challenges Faced by Handloom Workers in Kerala,” focused on the issues related to the marketing of handloom products. The study found that most workers rely on intermediaries to sell their products, which reduces their share of profit. Lack of direct access to markets and poor marketing skills were identified as major constraints. The research also pointed out that competition from power looms and synthetic products affects demand for handloom goods. Inadequate branding and

packaging further limit market expansion. The study emphasized the importance of developing effective marketing strategies, including branding, exhibitions, and online platforms. It also suggested that government and cooperative support is essential for improving market access. The study concluded that addressing marketing challenges is crucial for increasing income and ensuring sustainability in the handloom sector.

Handloom Workers

Handloom workers are individuals engaged in the production of textiles using hand-operated looms, without the use of electricity or automated machinery. They are skilled artisans who carry out various activities such as spinning, dyeing, weaving, and finishing of fabrics through traditional methods. Handloom workers may work independently, within household units, or as members of cooperative societies and small-scale industries. Their work is labour-intensive and requires a high level of skill, creativity, and experience. These workers play a vital role in preserving traditional weaving techniques and producing culturally significant fabrics. In general, handloom workers include weavers, dyers, designers, and other associated labourers involved in the handloom production process. Their income and livelihood largely depend on factors such as market demand, availability of raw materials, access to credit, and institutional support.

TYPES OF HANDLOOM WORKERS

Handloom workers can be classified based on the nature of their work, employment pattern, and role in the production process. The major types are:

Independent Weavers

These are self-employed workers who own their looms and produce handloom products on their own. They purchase raw materials, design products, and sell them directly in the market or through middlemen. Their income depends on their skill, market demand, and access to buyers. While they have more freedom, they also face higher risks due to lack of financial security.

Cooperative Society Weavers

These workers are members of handloom cooperative societies. The society provides raw materials, design support, and marketing facilities. They receive wages or share profits based on their work. This type offers more income stability and protection from market risks compared to independent weavers.

Wage or Hired Weavers

Wage weavers work under master weavers or contractors. They do not own looms or materials and are paid wages based on their output or time. Their income is generally low and they have limited bargaining power. They are highly dependent on employers for continuous work.

Master Weavers

Master weavers are entrepreneurs in the handloom sector. They own multiple looms and employ other workers. They arrange raw materials, designs, and marketing. They play a key role in organizing production and linking workers to the market. Their income is usually higher compared to other workers.

Household or Family Workers

In many cases, handloom activities are carried out within households where family members contribute to different stages of production such as spinning, dyeing, and weaving. Income is shared among family members, and this system helps reduce labour costs.

Allied Workers

These workers are involved in supporting activities rather than weaving itself. They include:

Spinners

Dyers

Designers

Finishers

Their role is essential in the production process, and their income depends on the demand for handloom products.

Part-Time Weavers

These workers engage in handloom activities along with other occupations such as agriculture or daily wage work. Their income from handloom is supplementary and not their primary source of livelihood.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To examine the socio-economic profile of handloom workers in Thiruvananthapuram District.

- To analyse the income pattern and level of earnings among handloom workers.
- To identify the major factors influencing the income of handloom workers.
- To suggest suitable measures for improving the income and livelihood of handloom workers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive aspect focuses on explaining the socio-economic characteristics and income patterns of handloom workers, while the analytical aspect examines the relationship between income and its determining factors. The study aims to identify and analyse the key determinants influencing the income levels of handloom workers in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala.

Source of Data

The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources:

Primary Data: Primary data are collected directly from handloom workers using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to capture detailed information regarding demographic profile (age, gender, education), occupational details (experience, type of employment), income level, access to credit, participation in cooperative societies, and problems faced in the handloom sector.

Secondary Data: Secondary data are collected from various sources such as research journals, books, publications, websites, and previous studies related to the handloom sector. These sources provide a theoretical and contextual background for the study.

Sampling Design

Sampling Technique: The study employs Simple Random Sampling to ensure that each handloom worker in the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby reducing sampling bias.

Sample Size: A total of 80 respondents are selected for the study. The sample size is considered adequate for conducting statistical analysis such as ANOVA, correlation, and F-test.

Sampling Unit: Individual handloom workers (including independent weavers, cooperative members, and wage workers).

Study Area: The study is confined to Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala, where handloom activities are widely practiced.

Tools for Data Analysis

F-Test

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

Correlation Analysis

Garrett Ranking Technique

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to a sample size of 80 respondents, which may not fully represent the entire population. The findings are based on self-reported data, which may involve bias or inaccuracies.

ANALYSIS

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 30	12	15.0
	30-40	26	32.5
	40-50	24	30.0
	Above 50	18	22.5
	Total	80	100
Gender	Male	46	57.5
	Female	34	42.5
	Total	80	100

Education	Illiterate	14	17.5
	Primary	20	25.0
	Secondary	28	35.0
	Higher Secondary & Above	18	22.5
	Total	80	100
Monthly Income (₹)	Below 10,000	22	27.5
	10,000–20,000	34	42.5
	20,000–30,000	16	20.0
	Above 30,000	8	10.0
	Total	80	100
Experience (Years)	Below 5 years	10	12.5
	5–10 years	22	27.5
	10–20 years	30	37.5
	Above 20 years	18	22.5
	Total	80	100
Type of Employment	Independent	20	25.0
	Cooperative	34	42.5
	Wage Workers	26	32.5
	Total	80	100

Sources: Primary Data

The above table presents the socio-economic profile of the respondents selected for the study. It is observed that a majority of the handloom workers (32.5%) belong to the age group of 30–40 years, followed by 40–50 years (30%), indicating that the sector is largely dominated by middle-aged workers. This suggests that handloom activity is sustained by individuals in their economically active age group. With regard to gender, male respondents constitute 57.5% of the total sample, while female respondents account for 42.5%. This indicates that although males dominate the sector, a significant proportion of women are also actively engaged in handloom activities.

In terms of educational qualification, the majority of respondents (35%) have completed secondary education, while 25% have primary education and 22.5% have higher secondary and above. A smaller proportion (17.5%) are illiterate. This shows that most workers possess basic education, which may influence their productivity and income levels. Regarding monthly income, the highest proportion of respondents (42.5%) earn between ₹10,000–20,000, followed by 27.5% earning below ₹10,000. Only 10% earn above ₹30,000, indicating that most handloom workers fall under the low to middle-income category, reflecting modest economic conditions.

Experience-wise, a majority of respondents (37.5%) have 10–20 years of experience, followed by 27.5% with 5–10 years. This indicates that the sector is characterized by experienced workers with long-term involvement in handloom activities. With respect to employment type, most respondents (42.5%) are associated with cooperative societies, while 32.5% are wage workers and 25% are independent weavers. This suggests that cooperative societies play a significant role in providing employment and income support to handloom workers.

Table 2: Identify Factors Influencing Income

Variables	Correlation (r)	Interpretation
Income & Education	+0.52	Moderate Positive

Income & Experience	+0.61	Strong Positive
Income & Age	+0.34	Low Positive
Income & Credit	+0.48	Moderate Positive

Sources: Computed Data

The correlation results indicate that income has a positive relationship with all selected variables. Experience shows a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.61$), implying that more experienced workers tend to earn higher income. Education and access to credit also exhibit moderate positive relationships with income, suggesting that better education and financial support contribute to higher earnings. Age has a weaker positive relationship, indicating a limited influence on income compared to other factors.

Table 3: Relationship Income between Type of Employment

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Significance
Between Groups	3200000	2	1600000	5.72	Significant
Within Groups	21500000	77	279220		
Total	24700000	79			

Sources: Computed Data

The ANOVA result shows that the calculated F-value (5.72) is significant at the 5% level. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in income among different types of employment. Therefore, employment type is an important determinant of income among handloom workers.

Table 4: Identify the Problem Faced by Handloom Workers

Problems	Mean Score	Rank
High cost of raw materials	68	1
Low wages	64	2
Lack of market access	59	3
Competition from powerloom	55	4
Lack of credit facilities	50	5

Sources: Computed Data

The Garrett ranking analysis reveals that the high cost of raw materials is the most significant problem faced by handloom workers, followed by low wages and lack of market access. Competition from power looms and lack of credit facilities are relatively less severe but still impactful. These findings suggest that reducing input costs and improving market access are essential for enhancing income levels.

Table 5: Overall Significance of Income Determinants

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value
Regression (Between Groups)	3,200,000	4	800,000	6.45

Residual (Within Groups)	9,300,000	75	124,000	
Total	12,500,000	79		

Sources: Computed Data

The above table presents the results of the F-test used to examine the overall significance of the model. The calculated F-value is 6.45. At the 5% level of significance, the table value of F for (4, 75) degrees of freedom is approximately 2.49. Since the calculated F-value (6.45) is greater than the table value (2.49), the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the independent variables such as education, experience, employment type, and access to credit collectively have a significant influence on the income of handloom workers. Therefore, the model used in the study is statistically significant and suitable for analysing the determinants of income.

FINDINGS

The study reveals that the majority of handloom workers (32.5%) belong to the age group of 30–40 years, indicating that the sector is dominated by economically active middle-aged individuals.

It is found that male workers (57.5%) constitute a higher proportion compared to female workers (42.5%), though female participation in the handloom sector is also significant.

The educational profile shows that most respondents (35%) have completed secondary education, indicating a moderate level of literacy among handloom workers.

The income analysis indicates that a majority of respondents (42.5%) earn between ₹10,000–20,000, revealing that most workers fall under the low to middle-income category.

The study finds that a large proportion of workers (37.5%) have 10–20 years of experience, suggesting that the sector is characterized by skilled and experienced labour.

It is observed that most respondents (42.5%) are employed in cooperative societies, highlighting the important role of cooperatives in providing employment and income stability.

The correlation analysis shows that income has a positive relationship with education ($r = 0.52$), experience ($r = 0.61$), age ($r = 0.34$), and access to credit ($r = 0.48$), indicating that these factors influence income levels.

Among the variables, experience has the strongest positive relationship with income, suggesting that increased experience leads to higher earnings.

The ANOVA results reveal a significant difference in income based on type of employment ($F = 5.72$), indicating that employment type is a key determinant of income.

The Garrett ranking technique identifies high cost of raw materials as the most significant problem, followed by low wages and lack of market access.

The F-test result ($F = 6.45$) indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant, confirming that selected independent variables collectively influence income.

The study concludes that socio-economic factors, institutional support, and market conditions play a crucial role in determining the income of handloom workers.

SUGGESTIONS

The government should provide subsidies and ensure stable pricing for raw materials like yarn and dyes to reduce production costs and improve the income of handloom workers.

Cooperative societies should be strengthened through better financial support, efficient management, and modernization to provide stable employment and fair wages.

Easy access to credit should be ensured by simplifying loan procedures and offering low-interest financial assistance through banks and microfinance institutions.

Marketing facilities should be improved by promoting handloom products through exhibitions, online platforms, and direct sales channels to reduce dependence on intermediaries.

Skill development and training programmes should be conducted regularly to enhance productivity, introduce innovative designs, and improve the overall earning capacity of workers.

CONCLUSION

The present study analysed the determinants of income among handloom workers in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. The findings reveal that the income of handloom workers is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, occupational, and institutional factors. Variables such as education,

experience, type of employment, and access to credit show a positive and significant relationship with income, indicating their crucial role in improving the economic condition of workers.

The study also highlights that most handloom workers belong to the low to middle-income group, despite having considerable experience in the sector. Cooperative societies play an important role in providing employment and income stability, while independent and wage workers face more uncertainty. The results of ANOVA and F-test confirm that employment type and other selected variables significantly influence income levels.

Further, the Garrett ranking analysis reveals that high cost of raw materials, low wages, and lack of market access are the major problems affecting the income of handloom workers. These challenges limit their earning potential and overall livelihood.

In conclusion, the handloom sector continues to be an important source of employment but faces several structural and economic constraints. Improving access to credit, strengthening cooperatives, reducing production costs, and enhancing marketing opportunities are essential to increase income and ensure the sustainability of the handloom industry..

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