

Socio-Economic Condition and Insecurity of Handloom Weavers of India:

A Systematic Literature Review

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DOI: 10.23862/kiit-parikalpana/2022/v18/i2/215263

[Article submitted on: 16.5.22; Revised on: 10.10.22; Accepted on: 25.10.22]

Abstract

In recent years the socio-economic condition of weavers has been degraded in terms of loss of jobs, loss of income, high production costs, several health issues. Thus, this paper aims to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) based on a survey of 30 papers published between 2015 and 2021 on the subject of socio-economic issues, health hazards and business problems of handloom weavers to acquire an updated picture of these domains. The Google Scholar search engine was used, and SLR produced intriguing results documented in this review paper. The government has adopted several welfare laws and projects. Despite several plans, the handloom business has numerous challenges, including worldwide marketing rivalry, low income, and low market pricing. As a result, weaver's social and economic situations have been deteriorating. Weak organizational structure, low pay, inadequate infrastructure, dispersed looms, poor marketing, and other factors made them more vulnerable.

Keywords: Socio-economic condition, health hazards, business problems, handloom weavers, poor marketing

1. Introduction

The handloom industry is playing a pivotal role in the sustenance of the culture and heritage. This sector is also providing employment to the rural mass. Handlooms form the

highest employment generating, labor-intensive and export-oriented industry, especially in rural and semi-urban areas in India (Kaushik and Jain 2015). In reality, together with agriculture, the handloom sector is the backbone of the

country's rural economy. Aside from agriculture, the handloom sector is responsible for most rural employment and revenue. This sector is one of the largest unorganized sectors after agriculture having advantages of being less capital intensive, minimal use of power, eco-friendly, adaptable to market requirements etc. (Jain and Gera, 2017).

Handloom weaving is India's largest cottage and labor-intensive business, and it has played a significant role in the country's economy by preserving India's rich heritage and demonstrating the weavers' unique handicraft. Chary and Usha (2021) observed that India's handloom industry has a long history of beautiful and unrivaled craftsmanship. Chinnu and Sheeba (2021) added that the handloom sector is a part of India's legacy, depicting the country's wealth and diversity and the weavers' skills.

It provides around a quarter of the country's apparel needs. Academics from all over the world have been interested in the topic and have conducted extensive research on the socioeconomic issues of handloom weavers.

However, the handloom census report (2019-20) states that the monthly income of 68.5% of rural weavers is less than Rs 5000, and the income of .01% of handloom weavers lies between Rs 50000 to 100000. No weavers are earning more than Rs 1 lakh. The fate of urban weavers is also similar.

Handloom workers are also referred to as home-based laborers in metropolitan areas (Sivasubramanian and Rajendran, 2019). Das (2021), Rao and Sreedhar

(2017), Tiwari (2017), Bari *et al.* (2015), and many other researchers have shown concern regarding the degrading socio-economic condition of handloom weavers in India. In addition, Western *et al.* (2012) risk of economic loss fosters economic insecurity.

Thus, it is the need of the time to study the socio-economic status of the handloom weavers along with the health issues faced by them which ultimately leads to insecurity.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study aims at assessing the socio-economic condition of handloom weavers in India by analyzing the existing literature. The working environment and the nature of work of such weavers is prone to several health issues. Thus, the study also dissects the health condition of such weavers. Business issues like marketing and finance problems are also summarized from the available literature.

3. Methodology of the Study

This review article examines current literature on the socio-economic condition, health issues, and business hindrances of weavers, emphasizing the authors' suggestions and deductions. The systematic literature review (SLR) which identifies, selects, and critically assesses material to answer a given topic (Dewey and Drahota, 2016) here aimed to gain a current picture of growing research trends based on handloom weavers' socioeconomic issues in particular.

The search engine "Google Scholar"

was used, and search terms like “socio-economic issues”, “health hazards”, “business problems”, “financial problems” etc. are used. The following criteria were used to choose the articles included in the review: a. chronological order in descending order beginning in 2021, and b. a variety of contextual contexts in terms of geography and product or process. The content of the articles was chosen to answer the following question: What are the most recent research trends on rising research trends based on handloom weavers’ socioeconomic issues? According to the rule-of-thumb criterion for the minimum size of the sample based on assumptions of the central limit theorem and normal distribution, the sample size for the review was set to at least 30 papers (Hogg *et al.*, 2010).

The analysis was carried out using the widely used qualitative method (De Hoyos and Barnes, 2012), with Gibson and O’Connor (2003) stating that the general steps in this type of analysis include organizing qualitative data, identifying and organizing concepts and ideas, developing themes, classifying and categorizing themes, connecting the data, and interpreting the results.

4. Discussion

4.1 Socio-Economic Condition of Handloom Weavers

The livelihood of handloom weavers is distressed (Das, 2021), their income is relatively poor (Rao and Sreedhar, 2017) and the community is suffering from acute scarcity and extreme poverty, making it difficult for them to meet their day-to-day costs (Tiwari,

2017). Weavers’ socio-economic condition is also symptomatized by low pay, unemployment, lack of demand (Muneendra and Prakash, 2016), low working capital, and raw material availability (Selvaraj and Tamilrasi, 2016). Moreover, the shelter used by weavers of Trivandrum area can only accommodate 8-10 looms, and are excessively close together. Most of the sheds are open, with unfinished floors, low roofs with tin sheets, crammed with pit looms, and inadequate illumination. Covid pandemic added woes to it and a tiny number of weavers are getting the benefits of different government schemes (Khatoon and Iffat, 2021). The manufacturing of handloom products is dropping off significantly in recent years (Gowreeswari and Bama, 2019) and weavers have become jobless (Naidu and Jayachandra, 2014). Varghese and Salim (2015) focused on the difficulties and challenges of the Handloom industry in Kerala and found that the industry is mainly competing with the power loom industry. Bari *et al.* (2015) traced those weavers have been discouraged from continuing to weave due to a lack of education and other sources of income. Prathap and Naidu (2015) found that the handloom weavers of Vontimitta Mandal in Kadapa District of Andhra Pradesh are very poor. The weavers of Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh are also in similar condition (Satyanarayana *et al.*, 2017; Balasubrahmanyam and Muthumeenakshi (2018). Panda and Parida (2019) concerned that there is an urgent need to conserve the occupation of vernacular weavers of Nuapatna of Odisha, India.

4.2 Health Hazards and Socio-Economic Insecurity

Durlov *et al.* (2014) stated that weavers of West Bengal suffer from low back pain when there is an increase in working. Rao and Sreedhar (2017) found that weavers of Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh have been encountering health problems like back pain, eye-sight issues, knee pain, joint pain etc. Ramdan *et al.* (2018) found that women weavers of Indonesia are facing severe muscular diseases. Kumar and Karmakar (2018) opined that high noise and low illumination levels are often encountered by handloom weavers in Bargarh Districts of Odisha. Parida (2019) discovered that the weaving occupation is primarily affected by Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), which led to economic imbalances in their families. Durlov *et al.* (2019) also reiterated that weavers with low-economic conditions in West Bengal are usually suffering different health problems like body pain, eye constraint, respiratory problems, etc. Siddiqui *et al.* (2021) generalized that the weaving business has a high rate of work-related musculoskeletal problems. The neck, shoulders, back, and wrist are the most afflicted body parts.

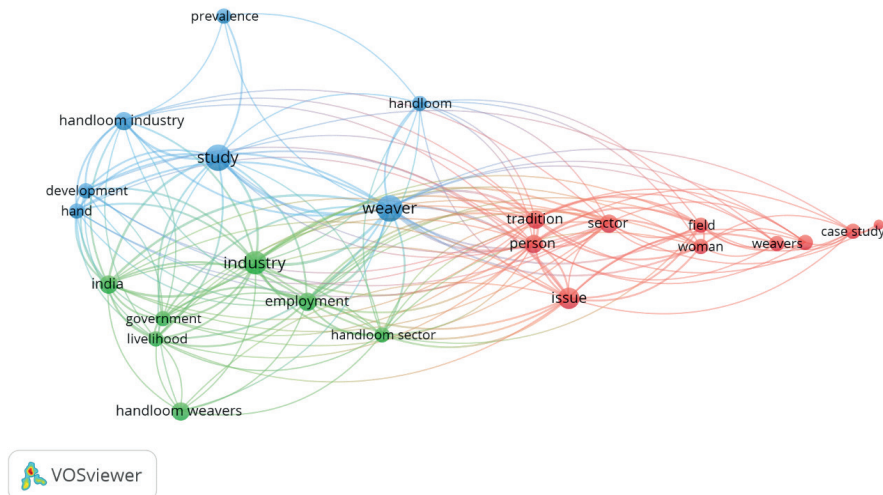
4.3 Marketing & Finance Issues and Socio-Economic Insecurity

Tanusree (2015) studied the present condition of handloom weavers of Varanasi, India and concluded that handloom weavers of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh have lost their prestigious traditional industry due to the invention of the power loom, increasing-price of

yarn, low wages and labour problem etc.

Bari *et al.* (2015) stated that weavers often encountered high yarn prices and low final product realization. Bhagavatula *et al.* (2010) measured the influence of human and social capital on resource procurement and opportunity identification in the Indian Handloom industry. The authors found that human capital, directly and indirectly, influences resource procurement and opportunity identification. Jain and Gera (2017) did analytical research in which they discovered specific issues with the handloom sector, such as a lack of accurate and authentic data and low yarn quality, financial crisis, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of education, skills-based training and research, a paucity of inputs and their growing costs, a problem with working capital. Barik and Behera (2017) traced that weavers of Athagarh zone of Odisha are facing marketing problems. Weavers also failed to compete with power looms and their business profits have been diminished day by day (Malarkodi *et al.*, 2020). Gowreeswari and Bama (2019) added that the manufacturing of handloom cotton sarees has decreased owing to high production costs, long loan applications etc. Chinnu and Sheeba (2021) observed that handloom workers have been facing several challenges like insufficient yarn supply, poor quality of raw material, high production cost etc.

In keyword co-occurrence analysis, nodes represent keywords and lines connecting them represent co-occurrence. Here, keywords with a minimum occurrence of two have been

Fig 1: Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Source: Compiled in VoS Viewer considered for the analysis. As shown in the above figure, three clusters are identified. The largest cluster coloured in blue focus on study related to the weavers, handloom industry and its development. The green cluster,

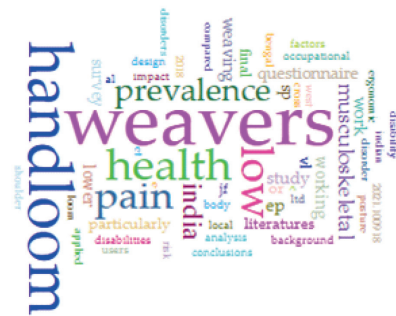
the second largest one, focuses on employment issues and government initiatives towards the handloom sector. The third cluster coloured in red focuses on tradition and issues in the sector along with the role of women in the

**Fig 2: Word Cloud of Socio-Economic Issues**

Source: Compiled in <https://voyant-tools.org/>

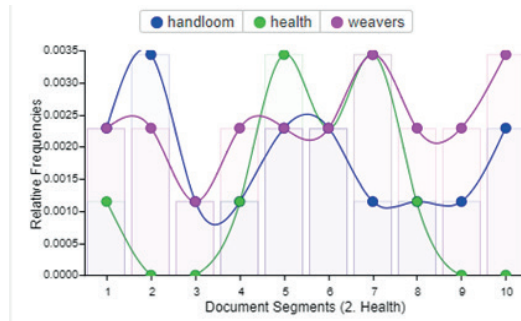
deduce the worsening socio-economic condition of the handloom weavers of India.

In the fig-3, prominent words are handloom, weavers, pain, health, surgery etc. inferring the prevalence of several health issues among the handloom weavers. The weavers have been



Source: Compiled in <https://voyant-tools.org/>

Figure 4, below explains the combination of high-frequency words from the literature explaining health issues. Three words i.e., handloom, health and



Source: Compiled in <https://voyant-tools.org/>

weavers are high-frequency words. These three words are found in all the literature which infers that handloom weavers face several health problems.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Conditions of Handloom Weavers of India

Author(s)	Geographical Scope	Study Parameter	Major Findings	Reasons
Das (2021)	Western Odisha	The livelihood of Sambalpuri Handloom Weavers	Dissatisfaction on income	Lion's share of income leaked to intermediaries
Malarkodi et al. (2020)	Coimbatore and Erode, Tamil Nadu	Business Issues	Poor Business Profit	Participation of intermediaries, and competition from power loom sectors
Gowreeswari and Bama (2019)	Pollachi Taluk, Tamil Nadu	Business Issues	High Cost of Product	Ineffective government programs
Durlov (2014,2019)	West Bengal	Socio-Economic Conditions	Degrading Socio-economic condition	Health Issues like Low Back Pain, Respiratory Problem
Jayachandra & Naidu (2018)	Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh	Role of Co-operative Society	Jobless	Dormancy of Co-operative Societies
Kumar & Karmakar (2018)	Bargarh, Odisha	Health Issues	Continuous health problem	High level of noise and low level of illumination
Rao & Sreedhar (2017)	Krishna, Andhra Pradesh	Socio-economic and Health Condition	Lots of Health Issues	Poor Performance of the co-operative sector, and the poor economic condition

Source: Compiled from different literature

The table above summarizes some closely related literature and revealed

the reasons for the degraded socio-economic and health conditions of handloom weavers in India. The poor performance of cooperative societies, high cost of production, ineffective

government programs, and leaking of income to intermediaries are some causes for the poor socio-economic condition of such weavers. The work environment and working style caused may health issues like eye-sight issues, lower back pain, knee pain etc.

5. Findings and Implications

The settings of the 30 articles examined were diverse, including a wide range of handloom weavers and services. The Indian handloom industry is a centuries-old enterprise that employs many rural people. In the Indian economy, they have their niche. The handloom industry is arguably the country's largest cottage industry. After agriculture, the sector ranks second in terms of employment creation. They do so because they employ many weavers and other affiliated labour.

The evident pressure on the Indian handloom sector is an obvious and unmistakable observation. While 12 of the 30 publications evaluated focused on challenges in social circumstances, economic conditions, and their influence on handloom weavers, at least five of them specifically address raising the proper and appropriate wage, free medical camps and mobile health centres, and taking the necessary steps to ensure a constant supply of raw materials as essential aspects of socioeconomic concerns. Handloom weaving and welfare programs were examined in a few studies. The balance papers concentrated on many issues such as the production system, productivity, working capital, traditional product range, and marketing relations,

among others. Five papers specifically address the health issues which are encountered by the weavers. Ten papers mentioned the business problems of such weavers. When we add up the papers on handloom weavers and interventions like raising the proper and appropriate wage, free medical camps and mobile health centres and taking the necessary steps to ensure a constant supply of raw materials, etc., we find that almost two-thirds of the research falls into one of these two categories. A strong link between the two themes has been discovered in several study papers (Chary and Usha, 2021; Chinnu and Sheeba, 2021; Das, 2021; Malarkodi *et al.*, 2020). Power, productivity, and technology are all intertwined, and government interventions are one.

6. Conclusion

The predominant focus of current research on handloom weavers is clearly on socioeconomic issues. According to the findings of this study, handloom weavers in India who have historically worked as weavers are in a pitiful state due to low socioeconomic conditions, health issues and business problems. The handloom sector has been steadily diminishing over the years, and handloom weavers are experiencing considerable difficulties due to a high cost of yarns, high cost of production, unorganised market, loss of job and income etc. Unsystematic government policies, globalization, competition from power looms and mills, inefficient scheme implementation, and changes in social and economic situations are the other fundamental causes. Nonetheless,

the handloom industry in India is a centuries-old cottage business that may be found all across the country. It is a source of income for millions of people, either directly or indirectly. Handloom weaving is essentially decentralized, with weavers primarily drawn from the poorer and more vulnerable elements of society, who weave for their own needs and contribute to textile production.

Thus, the research identifies gaps in the handloom business, seeks to trace difficulties, and highlights them in many aspects and the influence of the handloom sector. A few suggestions for meeting people's fundamental needs for growth while also increasing the weaver's and his family's living conditions are also observed. Following research on the socio-economic conditions of weavers, a few recommendations for addressing the suffering of handloom weavers are to be offered. Government should provide technical training to women and create awareness for education within the weaving community by providing them with a shared working shed. There is a need to generate awareness and provide capacity development series to enable weavers to fulfil safety requirements.

Though handloom weaving has many strengths, it is going through a severe crisis with bad social and economic conditions. In order to make the sector viable, its strengths and weaknesses must be discovered and appraised. It can be deduced that handloom weavers of India are insured in terms of socio-economic livelihood in general and financial and business problems in general.

7. Scope for Future Research

The present study has collected articles from the Google Scholar database. Scopus and any other highly popular database could have been used for efficient research work. The number of literatures is limited to thirty which could have been significantly increased to trace a robust result. In addition, the core dimension of the study is concentrated in three broad segments viz. socio-economic conditions, health hazards and business problems. Other micro thrust areas like supply chain issues, product designing, promotion, advertisement etc. are ignored, the inclusion of these factors could have added more value to the findings of the study.

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