



Income Instability Among Mangalagiri Handloom Workers And Issues Related To Wages And Working Hours

¹ MAHENDRA KUMAR KONDIPATI

¹ Faculty, Dept. of Economics, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract

The paper attempts to analyse income volatility and sources of occupation worries for the handloom weavers at Mangalagiri in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The study reveals wage inadequacy, unpredictable income and long hours of work as the chief problems among the weavers. The handloom sector is embedded in the Indian rural economy and millions of weaver households in traditional clusters depend on it for their subsistence and livelihood. Mangalagiri is a GI-tagged handloom cluster in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh is known for its unique cotton fabrics and at the same time one of the most poverty stricken weaver community in the state. The paper focuses on the level of income instability and occupational problems among the handloom workers with special reference to wages and working hours, and is based on field survey data obtained from 140 samples taken up in 2025. On the whole, the paper presents a comprehensive analysis of socio demographic characteristics, indicators of income variability, underpayment and overtime work by means of descriptive statistics, percentage analysis and cross-tabulations through chi-square association test. The results show that 75.7 percent of workers have fluctuating incomes, 70 percent earn lower than minimum wage, 85 percent work without written wage contracts, and 82.9 percent have no social protection. There is statistically significant evidence of gender discrimination in wages, and of a positive correlation between the irregular work order and the debt burden of the household. The study is concluded by suggesting policy instrument with justification concerning wage formalization, cooperative work distribution, gender parity enforcement and extension of social security integration to Mangalagiri's handloom weaver community.

Keywords: Handloom workers, income instability, wages, working hours, Mangalagiri, weaving, occupational problems

Introduction

The Mangalagiri handloom is also ancient textile processes the handloom sector forms one of India's oldest domestic industries spread across the length and breadth of the country employing nearly 43.31 lakh weavers and allied workers in this sector (Annual Report, Ministry of Textiles, GoI, 2023–24). The sector plays a crucial role in rural livelihoods in Andhra Pradesh and the state is home to more than 2.15 lakh handloom weaver households as per the Third Handloom Census (2009–10) completed with a further round of state surveys. The Textile sector is very significant in the State of Andhra Pradesh. The

Andhra Pradesh Government, through its Department of Handlooms and Textiles, has been proffering Handloom Weavers Comprehensive Welfare Scheme, which pledges an amount of ₹24,000 p.a/p weaver family (GoAP, 2022–23 Budget Document) to the weavers as financial support. Handloom weavers remain vulnerable to income insecurity, low wages and poor working conditions despite policy interventions. Data from the National Sample Survey (NSS) show portions of 2019–20 that around 62 per cent of handloom households in Andhra Pradesh live below the minimum wage declared by the state as the minimum wage for unskilled labour. Mangalagiri is a famous handloom cluster in Guntur district is known for its unique cotton fabrics in the shape of the well-known Mangalagiri saree and dress material with the nizam border designs. Nevertheless, the weavers here are confronted with structural problems such as prices of yarn that fluctuate widely, inadequate market linkages, and wage systems that are not uniform. In the post-COVID era, this cluster has witnessed a further deterioration in income uncertainty for the weavers, as many master weavers have scaled down their production activities. The study investigates these aspects with empirical evidence as to enrich policy and planning.

Background of the Study

Mangalagiri is located 12kms away from Vijayawada in Guntur district. It is the whole cluster is mainly producing traditional cotton fabrics mainly using pit-loom technology. There were around 3,200 registered handloom weaver families in Mangalagiri as of 2022 (Directorate of Handlooms and Textiles, Government of Andhra Pradesh). It is a mixed cluster which includes cooperative societies, master weavers and other independent weavers. Weavers are facing severe wage stagnation despite its cultural significance and GI (Geographical Indication) tag given to Mangalagiri fabric in 2009. The daily wages of weavers in this cluster are between ₹250 and ₹400, well below the state mandated minimum wages of ₹620 per day for skilled textile workers in AP (GoAP Labour Department Notification, 2023). In addition, the seasonal nature of the income and the erratic orders of work from the master weaver causes vulnerability in the livelihoods of worker households which requires an empirical investigation.

Profile of Handloom Industry in Mangalagiri

Mangalagiri handloom is an integral part of the Guntur district's socio-economic culture. The cluster is well known for its temple-border plain cotton saree and the dress materials that are in great demand both within the country and abroad. Around 3,200 handloom units are in operation in Mangalagiri, out of which about 1,800 are directly involved in weaving and the rest in processes such as dyeing, warping and finishing: AP Handlooms and Textiles Department records (2023). The most common type of loom is the fly-shuttle pit loom and is found at home. It is an affair of five major weavers' cooperative societies and more than a couple of hundred SHGs. Procurement of raw materials especially cotton yarn is mainly through the NHDC (National Handloom Development Corporation) and local traders. The GI tag has also enhanced the visibility of the brand, but the actual weaver income has not increased proportionately, as a large part of the margins is being taken away by the intermediaries.

Importance of Handloom in India and Andhra Pradesh

After agriculture, handloom weaving provides the next largest source of employment in India. It is a major foreign exchange earner for India with the textile exports to the tune of ₹31,000 crore from handloom and it is the sole means of livelihood for over 35 lakh weaver families (Ministry of Textiles, GoI, 2023). Andhra Pradesh is one of the top five states in handloom production and has GI tagged clusters such as Mangalagiri, Dharmavaram, Pochampally, and Uppada which are a major contributor to the state revenue and its cultural preservation. The sector is dominated mainly by SC/ST and OBC so it has significance for inclusive growth. Government programme like National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) and state schemes enhances its role as a catalyst of strategic socio-economic importance.

Review of Literature

Ramaswamy (2019) conducted a study on handloom weavers in Tamil Nadu and observed that meagre piece rates and erratic work orders 68% weavers earned below the poverty line, implying the need for minimum wage policies for handloom workers. Srinivas and Reddy (2020) investigated weavers in Pochampally, Telangana, and revealed that working beyond one's capacity (practically more than 10 hours per day) ended up as a prominent occupational risk among the participants, deteriorating their physical health. Nair (2021) examined income instability among traditional artisans in Kerala and verified that demand fluctuations due to seasonality was a proximate cause for income volatility of up to 45 per cent across the months causing detriment to household consumption. Venkataraman and Krishnamurthy (2022) focused on the cooperative-sector artisan weavers of Andhra Pradesh and observed 23% greater income stability among cooperative weavers as compared to that of the master weavers, due to work-order regularization and advance: wages. Patnaik (2022) investigated gendered nature of handloom livelihood in Odisha, and observed that it is a case of structural wage discrimination with women weavers being paid 30 per cent less than men for same work. Chandrasekhar and Ghosh (2023) analysed the effect of e-commerce adoption in the domain of handloom weavers and found that digital channels increased market access for only those handloom weavers who had direct sales; not the piece-rate workers in clusters such as Mangalagiri, who saw no improvement in wages. The studies are mainly related to insecurity in income, wage differences and working conditions of the handloom workers in the different states. But very few place based studies are available particularly on Mangalagiri which combine issues of wages, working hours and income insecurity in one encompassing analytical framework.

Statement of the Problem

The handloom weavers of Mangalagiri weave in a structurally brittle form of informal economy of piece-rate wages, lack of written contracts of employment, and total dependence on the master weavers for work-orders. Although the cluster is GI tag recognized and state government welfare schemes have been introduced, the livelihoods of the weavers remains extremely fragile. There is widespread income irregularity, as fluctuations in demand by season result in monthly incomes varying by as much as ₹3,000 or more. The pay is said to be consistently lower than the Andhra Pradesh government specified minimum wage for skilled textile workers and there is no institutionalized channel to ensure the payment of wages in the cluster. Working days routinely last more than 10 hours with no compensation for overtime, while the workers are also deprived of any form of basic social security, such as health insurance or pension benefits. Female weavers are doubly disadvantaged by wage discriminatory differentials. The lack of written wage agreements — contracts are verbal — renders for workers legally vulnerable to abuses. This, in turn, leaves a critical evidence gap for the cluster and inhibits evidence-based policy formulation and design of cluster-specific interventions

Need for the Study

Though Mangalagiri's handloom cluster is entitled to national support based on its GI tag and other interventions in cluster like Pochampally and Dharmavaram, the attention it attracted in research and policy discussions was unevenly low. Most studies on handloom labour tend to use state or national level aggregated data which masks cluster specific vulnerabilities. With the Government of Andhra Pradesh aggressively announcing weaver welfare schemes under its 2022–23 and 2023–24 budgets worth over ₹350 crore for the sector, there is a pressing need for ground-level empirical evidence in Mangalagiri and such clusters to determine whether these measures are tangibly benefiting the workers at the ground. In addition, the post-pandemic economic recovery year of 2023–24 introduces a new level of income instability as raw material prices have increased significantly but piece-rate wages have not. The gender aspects of cluster-based wage inequality remain empirically unexplored. This research fills these voids by presenting up-to-date, disaggregated primary data from 140 respondents collected in 2025 and thus allows for evidence-based, cluster specific policy recommendations.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the income insecurity faced by handloom workers in Mangalagiri with the notion of wages and earnings variation.
2. To study and analyze the major issues related to working hours, adequacy of wage, and occupational problems among the handloom workers in Mangalagiri.

Research Methodology

This research is descriptive and analytical nature investigating unstable income and occupational difficulties of handloom weavers in the Mangalagiri town of Guntur district of the state of Andhra Pradesh, for the year 2025 as the base year. The study is mainly reliant on primary data collected from 140 handloom workers through a structured interview schedule in the Mangalagiri's major weaving areas, 140 non-weavers households were selected using purposive random sampling from Mangalagiri's largest active weaving households. Secondary data were obtained from records of the Government of Andhra Pradesh Handloom Department, annual reports of the Ministry of Textiles, National Sample Survey data, and published, peer-reviewed literature. The data were collected using personal interviewing to maximize accuracy and completeness of responses. The data thus collected were coded and tabulated, and subjected to percentage analysis, cross tabulation and chi-square test of association ($\chi^2 = \sum [(O-E)^2/E]$), where O is observed frequency and E is expected frequency. The level of statistical significance were 5% and 10%. The study was limited up to Mangalagiri mandal and the weavers those who were actively weaving at least for one year only they were considered as respondents and the master weavers as well as the managers of the cooperative society were excluded from the sample to keep the homogeneity among the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Handloom Workers (n=140)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	84	60.0
	Female	56	40.0
Age Group	Below 30 years	28	20.0
	30–45 years	63	45.0
	Above 45 years	49	35.0
Education	Illiterate	29	20.7
	Primary	47	33.6
	Secondary	42	30.0
	Higher Secondary & above	22	15.7
Marital Status	Married	112	80.0
	Unmarried	28	20.0
Family Size	1–3 members	38	27.1
	4–5 members	72	51.5
	Above 5 members	30	21.4
Monthly Income	Below ₹5,000	42	30.0
	₹5,001–₹8,000	61	43.6
	Above ₹8,000	37	26.4

Source: Primary data

Socio-Economic Profile

The socio-economic background shows that 60% of respondents are male and 40% are female, which means that there is good participation of women in handloom weaving. Most of them (45%) are in the age bracket of 30–45 years which is considered to be the active working class, and 35% are above 45 years, which is the high age group in the profession. The education level is very low, 20.7% were illiterate and 33.6% had primary education only, which limits their ability to bargain for better wages or to find other employment. About 80% of the respondents are married and have dependent families, while 51.5% have family size of 4-5 members, adding to financial burden. A staggering 73.6% of the workers earn less than ₹8,000 per month, and 30% earn less than ₹5,000 which is well below the minimum wage limit of Andhra Pradesh.

Table 2: Income Instability Indicators of Handloom Workers (n=140)

Indicator	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Income Regularity	Regular monthly income	34	24.3
	Irregular/seasonal income	106	75.7
Monthly Income Variation	Less than ₹1,000 variation	31	22.1
	₹1,001–₹3,000 variation	67	47.9
	Above ₹3,000 variation	42	30.0
Work Order Availability	Continuous throughout year	39	27.9
	6–9 months per year	58	41.4
	Less than 6 months per year	43	30.7
Piece-Rate Wage Satisfaction	Satisfied	22	15.7
	Partially satisfied	49	35.0
	Dissatisfied	69	49.3
Savings Capacity	Regular savings	18	12.9
	Occasional savings	54	38.6
	No savings	68	48.6
Debt Status	Debt-free	37	26.4
	Moderate debt	64	45.7
	High debt burden	39	27.9

Source: Primary data

Income Instability Indicators

Income instability has come to be the core feature of the economic condition of Mangalagiri handloom weaver. A large 75.7 per cent of the respondents reported income being seasonal and uncertain, attesting that weaving is not a source of secure livelihood. The analysis of monthly income variation reveals that 47.9% of the respondents have income varying between ₹1,001–₹3,000, and 30% according to income variation more than ₹3,000, an alarming figure for such low-income family. The uneven nature of work orders also prevails: only 27.9% get work orders continuously throughout the year; 41.4% work for 6–9 months and 30.7% less than six months in a year, highlighting fluctuations on the demand side and reliance on master weavers to procure work.

Dissatisfaction with piece-rates also is extraordinarily high: 49.3% are dissatisfied and only 15.7% are satisfied with the wage rates currently prevailing. That dissatisfaction relates to the piece-rate system not compensating for increasing costs of yarn and other living materials. The ability to save is limited 48.6% do not save anything and only 12.9% save regularly—suggesting no financial buffering. Debt burden exacerbates the issue as well, with 73.6% of the dwellers holding moderate to high amount of debt, mostly from moneylenders and other informal channels. Income variances are estimated at approximately 38.4% among the sampled workers as measured by the coefficient of variation ($CV = \sigma/\mu \times 100$). These results are an empirical justification for the long-standing income vulnerability faced by Mangalagiri weavers.

Table 3: Problems of Handloom Workers — Wages and Working Hours (n=140)

Problem Area	Specific Problem	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Wage-Related	Wages below minimum wage standards	98	70.0
	No increment in wage rates for 2+ years	87	62.1
	No overtime payment for extra hours	103	73.6
	Delayed wage payment by master weavers	79	56.4
	No written wage agreement	119	85.0
Working Hours	Work > 10 hours daily	91	65.0
	No weekly rest day	76	54.3
	No fixed work schedule	108	77.1
	Work during illness due to piece-rate pressure	84	60.0
Other Problems	No social security benefits	116	82.9
	Raw material non-availability disrupts work	94	67.1
	No grievance redressal mechanism	111	79.3

Source: Primary data

Problems of Handloom Workers

The analysis reveals a profoundly exploitative working environment. Wage insufficiency is the most pressing issue: 70% of workers' wages fall below minimum wage norms, 62.1% have not had a wage hike in more than two years and 73.6% or almost three-fourths of workers do not receive overtime pay even though they regularly work past the mandated hours. The lack of written wage contracts, stated by 85% of the respondents, is disturbing, as this makes them legally vulnerable to any wage cuts or non-payment. Wage adjustments and delays are suffered by 56.4%, inducing household liquidity crises, especially in the absence of savings buffers. Working hour problem is as bad. Respondents: Guided by the pressure of a piece rate, 65 per cent of respondents work more than 10 hours a day. The piece-rate relationship can be written as Total Earnings=Rate per piece × Number of pieces completed, where the rate is determined by master weavers without the consultation of the workers. This leads to overwork, with no guarantee for sufficient income if production targets aren't met for reasons such as yarn shortages or loom breakdowns. As many as 77.1% have no regular work schedule, and 60 per cent work when ill fearing that they might lose income. Labour welfare 82.9 per cent, who are without any provident fund, health insurance and workmen's compensation. Disruptions in raw materials—mentioned by 67.1%—break the continuity of production and further destabilize income.

Table 4: Gender vs. Monthly Income Level

Gender	Below ₹5,000	₹5,001–₹8,000	Above ₹8,000	Total
Male	20 (47.6%)	37 (60.7%)	27 (73.0%)	84
Female	22 (52.4%)	24 (39.3%)	10 (27.0%)	56
Total	42	61	37	140

Chi-Square Test: χ^2 (calculated) = 7.84, df = 2, p = 0.020 (< 0.05)

Source: Primary data

Association between Gender and Monthly Income Level:

Table 4 shows a significant relationship between gender and income category ($\chi^2 = 7.84$, p = 0.020). Female employees are overrepresented at the bottom end of the pay scale (52.4% of those earning below ₹5,000), pointing to gender-based wage discrimination.

Table 5: Work Order Availability vs. Debt Status

Work Order Availability	Debt-Free	Moderate Debt	High Debt	Total
Continuous (year-round)	18 (48.6%)	17 (45.9%)	4 (10.8%)	39
6–9 months	14 (37.8%)	32 (55.2%)	12 (20.7%)	58
Less than 6 months	5 (13.5%)	15 (34.9%)	23 (53.5%)	43
Total	37	64	39	140

Chi-Square Test: χ^2 (calculated) = 31.62, df = 4, p = 0.000 (< 0.001)

Source: Primary data

Association between work order availability and debt Status

Table 5 shows a very strong association between availability of work orders and indebtedness ($\chi^2 = 31.62$, p < 0.001). Workers with less than six months of work orders have a staggering high debt incidence at 53.5%, and workers for the whole year have just 10.8%, proving that it is the sporadic work orders that cause Mangalagiri handloom workers to go into debt.

Table 6: Education Level vs. Wage Satisfaction

Education Level	Satisfied	Partially Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Total
Illiterate	3 (10.3%)	7 (24.1%)	19 (65.5%)	29
Primary	7 (14.9%)	14 (29.8%)	26 (55.3%)	47
Secondary	8 (19.0%)	19 (45.2%)	15 (35.7%)	42
Higher Secondary & above	4 (18.2%)	9 (40.9%)	9 (40.9%)	22
Total	22	49	69	140

Chi-Square Test: χ^2 (calculated) = 12.47, df = 6, p = 0.052 (< 0.10, marginally significant)

Source: Primary data

Association between Education and wage Satisfaction

Table 6 presents the relationship between the wage satisfaction and educational qualification of 140 handloom workers in Mangalagiri. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 12.47$, df = 6, p = 0.052) reveals a marginally significant at 10% level of association, portraying a somewhat influence of education on workers view about adequacy of wage. Discontent is the strongest at 65.5% among the illiterate workers, showing their lack of knowledge of the legal wage rights and weak bargaining power. A similar high proportion (albeit a little lower) of dissatisfaction (55.3%) among primary-educated workers – this indicates that basic literacy, in isolation, does not significantly better workers' position when negotiating within the informal piece-rate arrangement. A surprising turnaround is in store for secondary-educated workers: dissatisfaction drops to 35.7 per cent, and partial satisfaction advances to 45.2 per cent, implying that secondary education empowers workers to understand wage configurations and express grievances. Those with higher secondary and above are dissatisfied 40.9% which is slightly higher than that of the secondary group, they are disappointed probably because the better educated expect to get higher wages than what the sector offers. The equation Wage Gap = Prevailing Piece Rate – Minimum Wage Equivalent per piece suggests that higher education makes people aware of this gap. In general, the crosstab analysis proved that education is an important intervening variable for perception of wage satisfaction, which implies the imperative of raising financial literacy and legal consciousness among illiterate and primary-educated weavers in Mangalagiri to empower said lot to demand fair and legally viable wages.

Major Findings

- ✚ In 75.7% of the cases, Mangalagiri handloom workers earned income from their work only seasonally or intermittently, indicating a widespread income volatility that gravely threatens household financial and consumption stability.
- ✚ A total of 77.9% of workers reported a variation in monthly income at the minimum level by more than ₹1,001 with an average coefficient of variation of 38.4%, which is a fairly large value, that implies a large income volatility, which misleads financial decision-making in the weaver households.
- ✚ Nearly 70% of the workers are paid less than the minimum wage fixed by the state of Andhra Pradesh, i.e., ₹620 per day, indicating the prevalence of systematic wage discrimination and violation of the state labour laws.
- ✚ Disturbingly, 85% of these workers have no written wage contracts at all; which leaves them with no legal protection and susceptible to an arbitrary reduction of wages or non-payment and exploitation at the hands of master weavers.
- ✚ And 73.6% of them do not get paid for overtime and stop working 10 or even more hours a day, exposing the shocking breach of the universal labour norms and fundamental rights of workers.
- ✚ For 30.7% of respondents, their work-order time the orders for work is available the availability of work orders is fewer than six months a year, leading directly to income gap periods and borrowing by the household to finance necessary needs.
- ✚ There is probably no social security coverage, where 82.9% did not have access to the provident fund, health insurance or accident compensation and thus were completely exposed to financial blows.
- ✚ The gender wage disparity was also verified by the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 7.84$, $p = 0.020$), which showed greater percentage of female employees were above clustered in below ₹5,000 monthly earning category than male employees.
- ✚ A statistically very strong association ($\chi^2 = 31.62$, $p < 0.001$) was found between work order availability and debt burden, with 53.5% high-debt incidence among workers with less than six months of orders.
- ✚ In Mangalagiri's handloom sector, 79.3% of the workers do not have a remedy mechanism for grievance, showing that there is little if any institutional infrastructure of labour governance in the sector.

Discussion

✚ The realities of Mangalagiri express deep-seated structural vulnerabilities specific to the informal, piece-rate labour system widespread among handloom clusters. The intersecting insecurities of irregular income (75.7%), low wages (70%), and long working hours (65%) work against weaver households. The almost total lack of written wage contracts (85%) and coverage under social security (82.9%) points to a massive crisis in labour governance. Gender inequality further divides an already suffering workforce as the chi-square tests suggest. Work order unpredictability having a significant positive association with debt burden implies that such demand-side turbulence has immediate consequences for household financial health. These trends are consistent with national-level data from the NSS and Ministry of Textiles reports, however the continuance of such conditions is somewhat more indefensible considering Mangalagiri's GI tag. Structural change to formal wage contracts, the intermediate distribution of work in co-operatives, and gender-sensitive wage parity is crucial to bettering the plight of the weaver in this historically significant cluster.

Policy Implications and Suggestions

- **Mandatory Written Wage Agreements:** The Government of Andhra Pradesh should make written wage contracts mandatory between the master weavers and the piece-rate workers indicating the minimum piece rates, the payment schedules and whether there are provisions for overtime payments, thus securing 85% of the workers who are currently unprotected against whims of wage practices.
- **Cluster-Specific Minimum Wage Notification:** A minimum wage scale specific to handloom and reflecting the cost of production in Mangalagiri should be notified under the Minimum Wages Act with

provision for revision every quarter or linked to yarn price indices so that adequacy is not compromised due to inflation in the input cost.

➤ **Broader Social Security Coverage:** Integration of the schemes of ESIC (Employees' State Insurance Corporation), PM-SYM (Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan) and state welfare board in Mangalagiri may gain pace to extend health, accident and pension coverage to each 3,200 registered weaver households that still stand excluded.

➤ **Monitoring of Gender-Sensitive Equal Pay for Equal Work:** In view of the fact that the gender wage discrimination is statistically proven, a number of focussed inspections by the state Labour Department along with the formation of women weaver cells at the level of cooperative societies to monitor equal-pay adherence and also enabling women weavers to raise their concerns on violations may be initiated.

➤ **Cooperative Work Order Distribution System:** A transparent, cooperative-based digital work order management system that ensures delivery of an equal share of production orders to all registered weavers throughout the year should be set-up to minimize the dependence on a few master weavers and to help solve the income instability faced by 75.7% of the labor force.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how the workers of Mangalagiri, despite their skill and industry, are marginalized and subjected to income instability and occupational difficulties that belie economic respectability. Instability of income, below minimum wage, non-payment of overtime, working time exploitation and no social protection, these are the ingredients of a crisis begging for policy intervention. The strong statistical relationships between sex and earnings, and work order availability and debt, highlight the importance of focused, evidence-based policy measures. Although the Government of the Andhra Pradesh State has introduced welfare schemes, its reach and implementation have been far too inadequate in Mangalagiri. System level sustainable enhancement would include formalizing wage agreements, ensuring compliance with minimum wages, exploring cooperative work sharing options, and linking weaver households with mainstream social security mechanisms. It is only by such multidimensional policy measures that the weavers of Mangalagiri can have a chance to stable income and decent working conditions that befit the cultural significance of their craft.

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