

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUPS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

*The self-help Group movement in India advocates the development of women especially in rural areas who suffer economically and socially. To overcome economic deprivation women need to alter their self image and self help group offers scope for women's development. They can be advocates and motivates to help other women to become self-reliant, self-confident and counsel for the development of people in rural settings. The individual women of self help groups have opportunities for their development in terms of awareness, to start own business, enterprises, etc. Also the SHGs enhances the personality of women members to face the challenges of the society and as well in decision – making. The SHGs may consist of 10-20 members and in case of disabled person and difficult areas i.e., hilly, desert and sparsely populated areas, this number may be a minimum of five. Self help groups should also be drawn from the BPL list approved by the Gram Saba. Hence, the present study find out women empowerment through the self help groups in Nanjaikalakurichy village, Paramathi Block, Karur District.*

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Self Help Group, Women

### **Introduction**

Now women have to play a prominent role in the overall economic development of the country. Women constitute around 50 per cent of the total world population. This is one of the reasons for selecting women as a target group for promoting self -employment. In every society women play a very crucial role. To accelerate the overall growth and prosperity of a nation, it is very important to create opportunities for socio-economic development of women. It is high time that the developing nations utilize their women force to the optimum level. It is imperative to note that men alone cannot break the shackles of poverty, unemployment, inequality and population explosion. With the quality of dedication, hard work, perseverance and honesty women are capable of producing much better results than men.

In traditional society they were confined to the four walls but in modern society they have, come out of the four walls to participate in all activities mainly in economic activities. Women today are awakened to the new concepts of life and their changing roles in family and society. Women have started stepping out of the age-old conventions and now they perform shoulder to shoulder with men in almost every field. Business and Commerce are the areas that challenged the wisdom and efficacy of ordinary women today. Human resources and specially the women power need to be assigned a key role in any development strategy. Trained and educated on sound lines, they become an asset in accelerating economic growth and in ensuring social change in desired directions, as education develops basic skills and abilities and fosters a value system conducive to national developmental goals.

### **Origin of Self-Help Groups**

The origin of SHGs is from the Brainchild of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Mohammed Yunus. SHGs were started and formed in 1975. In India NABARD is initiated in 1986-87. But real effort was taken after 1991-92 from the linkage of SHGs with the Banks. A SHGs is a small economically homogeneous affinity group of poor voluntary coming together to save small amount regularly, which is deposited in a common fund to meet members emergency needs and to provide collateral free loans decided by the group. They have been recognized as useful tool to help the poor and as an alternative mechanism to meet the urgent credit needs of poor through thrift. SHGs is a media for the development of saving habit among the women. SHGs enhance the quality of status of women as participants, decision-makers and beneficiaries in the democratic, economic, social and cultural spheres of life. The basic principles of the SHGs are group approach, mutual trust, organization of small and manageable groups; spirit of thrift, demand based lending, collateral fee, and women friendly loan, peer group pressure in repayment, skill training capacity building and empowerment.

In Tamil Nadu the SHGs were started in 1989 at Dharmapuri District. At present 1.40 lakh groups are functions with 23.83 lakh members as well as men also eager to form SHGs. Self-Help Groups should also be drawn from the BPL List approved by the Gram Saba. The SHGs broadly go through three stages of evolution such as

group formation, capital formation through the revolving fund and skill development, and taking up of economic activity. The group formation will keep in view the following broad guidelines:

Generally a self-help group may consist of 10 to 20 persons. However, in different areas like deserts, hills and areas with scattered and sparse population and in case of minor irrigation and disabled person, this number may be from 5-20. The different areas have to be identified by the State Level SGSY Committee and the above relaxation in membership will be permitted only in such areas.

Generally all members of the group should belong to families below the poverty line. However, if necessary, a maximum of 20% and in exception cases, where essentially required, up to a maximum of 30% of the members in a group may be taken from families marginally above the poverty line living contiguously with BPL families and if they are acceptable to the BPL members of the group. This will help the families of occupational groups like agricultural laborers, marginal farmers and artisans marginally above the poverty line, or who have been excluded from the BPL list to become members of the self- help group. However, the ABL members will not be eligible for the subsidy under the scheme. The group shall not consist of more than one member from the same family. A person should not be a member of more than one group. The BPL families must actively participate in the management and decision making, which should not ordinarily be entirely in the hands of APL families. Further, APL members of the self- help group shall not become office bearers (Group Leader, Assistant Group Leader or Treasurer) of the group.

The group should devise a code of conduct (group management norms) to bind itself. This should be in the form of regular meetings (weekly or fortnight), functioning in a democratic manner, allowing free exchange of views, particularly by the members in the decision making process.

The group should be able to priorities the loan applications, fix repayment schedules, fix appropriate rate of interest for the loans advanced and closely monitor the repayment of the loan installments from the loanee.

The group should operate a group account preferably in their service area bank branch, so as to deposit the balance amount left with the groups after disbursing loan to its members.

The group should maintain simple basic records such as Minutes book, Attendance register, Loan ledger, General ledger, Cash book, Bank pass book and individual pass books. The sample proforma for maintenance of above records by the group is in the Annexure II for guidance. These could be used with necessary changes/modifications wherever required.

Fifty (50) per cent of the groups formed in each block should be exclusively for the women. In the cases of disabled persons, the group formed should ideally be disability-specific wherever possible, however, in case sufficient number of people for formation of disability-specific groups are not available, a group may comprise of persons with diverse disabilities or a group may comprise of both disabled and non-disabled persons below the poverty line.

#### **Women Empowerment**

Here women empowerment is looked out at the limited of a women's membership of the self-help groups particularly in rural areas. Further rural women empowerment is studied in terms of SHGs women's influence over the economic resources of the households, participation in economic decision making and influence over other decision pertaining to general welfare of the households. SHG women's power over local political activities and participation in socio-political decision making and also influence on their own development as an individual constitute the components of empowerment. Further increased interactions and development of managerial and technical skills also constitutes of rural women empowerment.

#### **Social Empowerment**

It is studied in terms of equal status, participation and power of decision making of rural women in household, equal status, participation and powers of decision making in community and village, breaking social, cultural and religion barriers to equal development of women and increased status, participation and power of decision making in local democratic institutions.

#### **Economic Empowerment**

It is analyzed in terms of greater access to financial resources outside household, reduced to vulnerability of the poor women to crisis situation like famine, flood, riots etc., significant increase in the women's own income, equal access and control over resources at household level and financial self-reliance of women.

#### **Capacity Building**

It can be achieved through better awareness of SHGs women on health, education and environment, improved functional literacy, numeracy better communication skills better leadership skills and self-help and mutual help.

**Statement of the Problem**

There is a growing concern over women empowerment in India. The reason is that women in Indian society were subjected to various social and economic disabilities for many centuries. However, their status began to change during early part of the twentieth century by the efforts of various social movements, nationalist movements and reform movements. After Independence, the Government of India enacted various legislations to safeguard the right and privileges of women and also provision of adequate means of livelihood like that of men. Despite the above efforts, still the majority of the women in India suffer due to suppression, and socio-economic exploitation. In order to uplift women, our government has introduced women development programme in terms of Self-Help Groups. The SHG is a village based financial intermediately usually composed of 10-20 members. Most of the SHGs make small regular savings, contributor over a few months until there is enough capital in the group of begins lending funds. The funds are generally utilized by the rural women for expanding the household business. The beneficiaries will repay the loan together with interest and then the fund lending to others in the village for any purpose. In order to understand that how the rural women constitute SHGs and utilized corpus fund for their development activities, the present study is taken up Nanjaikalakurichy village, Paramathi Block, Karur District, with following objectives:

**Objectives**

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of the respondents of Self-Help Groups of the study village
2. To find out the reasons for joining Self-Help Groups\
3. To study the income, savings and expenditures of the respondents before and after joining Self-Help Groups.

**The Method**

The researcher has selected Nanjaikalakurichy village of Paramathi Block, Karur District for the present study. In this village several SHGs are functioning. But 16 SHGs are more effectively functioning with 167 group members. The researcher has collected data from 167 SHGs members by using census method. Using well structured interview schedule the information and necessary data were obtained from the group members and the data were arranged and classified for analysis. The analysis of the data and interpretation are presented below.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table-1: Age Wise Distribution of the Respondents**

Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below 20	22	13.17
20 --- 30	46	27.55
30 ---40	48	28.75
Above --40	51	30.54
Total	167	100.00

Table- 1 shows that data on age wise distribution of the respondents. It could be noted that out of the total 167 respondents, 13.17 per cent of the respondents are belong to the age group of below 20 years and 27.55 per cent of them fall under the age group of 20-30 years. Further, 28.74 per cent of the respondents are come under the age group of 30-40 years and 30.54 per cent of them the age group of 40 years and above. It is clearly from the above discussion that the majority of the respondents are in the age group of below 40 years who involve themselves more effectively in the self-help group activities in the study village.

**Table-2: Distribution of the Respondents by their Reason for Joining SHGs**

Reasons	No. of Respondents	percentage
For getting loan	66	39.52

Table-2  
 reveals that  
 data on  
 distribution

For promoting savings	29	17.37
For social status	52	31.14
For other reasons	20	11.97
Total	167	100.00

of the respondents by their reasons for joining in self-help groups. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, 39.52 per cent of the respondents have joined the self-help groups for financial assistance and 17.37 per cent of the respondents have joined for improving their savings. 31.14 per cent of the respondents have said that for social status because the self help groups give identity to the members and remaining 11.97 per cent of them have said that other reasons for joining members of self help groups such as to save money regularly, discuss possible ways of income generation for members and to take part in internal lending and availing of its benefits. It is clearly from above discussion that almost all the respondents have changed their positive thinking due to the joining the SHGs.

**Table-3: Distribution of the Respondents by their Monthly Income Before and After Joining SHGs**

Monthly income (In. Rs)	Before Joining SHGs		After Joining SHGs	
	No. of Respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1000	22	13.17	11	6.59
1000-3000	73	43.71	77	46.11
3000-6000	25	14.97	59	35.30
Above-6000	11	6.59	12	7.19
Non-earning members	36	21.56	8	4.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table-3 presents that data on distribution of the respondents by their monthly income of before and after joining of SHGs. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, the majority (21.56%) of the respondents have did not earn anything before joining the SHGs. But after joining the self-help groups the respondents have been earning reasonably in SHGs' activities. Many respondents have involved independently in the economic activities after joining SHGs, as well as they are now economically independent and contribute to increase their household income. It is clearly from the above discussion that the HSGs generated the impact of monthly income and their social life in the study village.

**Table-4: Distribution of the Respondents by their Monthly Family Expenditure of before and after Joining SHGs**

Family expenditure (monthly In.Rs)	Before Joining SHGs		After Joining SHGs	
	No. of Respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1000	51	30.54	27	16.17
1000-2000	62	15.12	42	25.15
2000-3000	31	18.56	50	29.94
3000-4000	12	7.19	32	19.16
Above 4000	11	6.59	16	9.58
<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table- 4 shows that data on distribution of the respondents by their monthly family expenditures of before and after joining SHGs. It could be noted that out of the total respondents, the majority (45.66%) of the respondents have said that before joining SHGs their family expenditure has been averaged in the range of below Rs. 1000 to Rs.2000. The scenario changed significantly when they joined SHGs fifty per cent of the respondents have reported that their monthly family expenditure has been increased in the range of above Rs. 2000. It is clearly exposed that the majority of the respondents have reported that their monthly family expenditure has been increased due to the joining the SHGs.

**Table-5: Distribution of the Respondents by their Monthly Family Savings of before and after Joining SHGs**

Family monthly savings (In. Rs)	Before Joining SHGs		After Joining SHGs	
	No. of Respondents	Percentage	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 200	66	39.52	44	26.35
200-300	40	23.95	50	29.94
300-400	34	20.36	39	23.35
Above-400	29	17.37	34	20.36
<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table -5 reveals that data on distribution of the respondents by their monthly family savings of before and after joining SHGs. It could be noted that out of total respondents, the majority (63.47%) of the respondents have said that the before joining SHGs their family savings below Rs. 300 per month. At the same time, 43.71 per cent of the respondents have said that after joining SHGs their family savings has been increased in the range of above Rs. 300 per month. It is clear from the above discussion that almost all the respondents' family savings has been increased due to the joining of SHGs in the study village.

#### **Conclusion**

The Self-Help Groups really help the women-folk to participate in organize activities apart from helping members to mobilize funds. SHGs mainly concerned with the enlistment of the women in the society through, social and economical aspects. It leads to provide and bring the empowerment to the women and also provide self-employment, training, awareness programs, promote leadership qualities and confidential life to its members. Hence, the SHGs providing adequate financial support, guidance to start small business, technical support can uplift their standard of living. If they utilized this efficiently, they don't face poverty in rural areas.

Further, the study results indicate that the income of the women has been increased after joining the SHGs as well as the monthly household expenditure also has been raised considerable level. But the family savings is increasing at slow rate, because the incremental expenditure is higher. The study results highlight that all the SHGs members feel their self respect and self confidence. Thus, the research study emphasizes that the SHGs are the effective instruments of women empowerment in the study village.

#### **Suggestions:**

- The Government and Non-Government Organizations should provide full active and continuous support to women to solve their problems
- Insurance may be taken by SHGs for their business because it gives protection against risks
- Health insurance and pension scheme for SHGs members
- The Government should allocate them a separate place specially for marketing their products under one roof like shopping mall in every district

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