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IMPACT OF SELF HELP GROUPS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Women constitute half of the World's population, accomplish about 2/3 rd of its working hours receive 1/10th of the World's income but they are considered a weaker group in economic development. However in the context of national development, women's participation in the economic activity is of crucial importance. In the words of former President A.P.J. Abdul kalam, empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation (Sharma 2006).

The word 'empowerment' captures the sense of gaining control over lives by participating in decision making. Though women need to be empowered in all the areas it is economic independence which is the most prominent means of empowerment. A self help group is a means of economic empowerment and it is a tool to remove poverty and improve the rural development. (Vinayag Moorthy, 2007).

The origin of SHGs is from the brainchild of Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by Mohammed Yuan's. SHGs were started and formed in 1975. The major aim of the SHGs is to promote savings and to credit for the productive and consumption purposes. The borrowing members choose an economic activity of their own for income generation purposes.

The SHGs inculcate habit of saving among its members for a period of time and then begin giving loans to needy members from the collective savings of the group. The SHGs have resulted in empowerment of women, reduced dependency on moneylenders and provided easy access to credit for their members. In this context, a research study on "**Impact of self help groups on women empowerment**" was undertaken with the following **objectives**:

1. To understand the social background of the respondents

2. To study the income, expenditure and savings of the members after joining SHGs.
3. To know the nature of benefits received by the members of SHG and
4. To study the problems as perceived by the individual member

Methodology

The present study was exploratory study conducted to know the impact of the participation of women in self-help groups to empower themselves. The locale of the study was confined to urban Coimbatore on the grounds of easy accessibility.

Out of 30 SHGs in the Saibaba Colony area, five groups were selected randomly based on lottery method. Each group consists of 20 members. Thus the sample size was restricted to 100 members representing the Coimbatore urban limit.

The schedule was designed to collect information pertaining to biographical characteristics, reasons for joining SHGs, information on bank loans, income, expenditure and savings, type of activity and problems and prospects of enterprise.

Tools of analysis

a. T- test

T- test was used to test the significant difference in income earned before and after joining SHG.

The formula used was

$$t = \frac{\bar{d}\sqrt{n}}{S}$$

b. Garrett's Rating Scale

Garrett's rating scale technique was applied to give scores for the various problems faced by the respondents. Scores were obtained by first calculating the percent position which is given by the formula:

$$\text{Percent Position} = \frac{100(R-0.5)}{N}$$

Where R = The ranks assigned to the problems.

N = The number of problems

The percent is converted into its equivalent scores by referring to Garret's rating scale.

Findings of the study

A. Profile of the respondents

Table I, depict the profile of sample women in selected self-help groups.

TABLE-I : PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Age (in years)		
Less than 25	3	3
25-35	33	33
35-45	53	53
Above 45	11	11
Total	100	100
Religion		
Hindu	82	82
Muslim	10	10
Christian	8	8
Total	100	100
Marital status		
Married	97	97
Widows	3	3
Total	100	100
Family structure		
Nuclear	85	85
Joint Family	15	15
Total	100	100
Educational status		
Illiterate	15	15
Primary	24	24
Secondary	44	44
College	17	17
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

In the urban area of Coimbatore, 25-35 and 35-45 age group are actively participated in the self-help group activities. Majority of respondents belonged to the Hindu religion, which accounted to 82 percent. The marital status was one of the important factors, which affected the socio-economic status of the respondents. Ninety seven percent of the respondents were married. Table-I indicated that majority of the households hailed from nuclear families, which accounted to 85 percent and remain 15 percent of the respondents were from joint families. From the table, it could be observed that 15 percent of the respondent did not have any formal education. About 44 percent of them were four

be educated up to secondary level, 24 percent of them were found to be educated upto primary level and 17 percent of the respondents had college level education. Thus, it could be inferred that, higher levels of education may enable the members to perform well in the endeavors that they venture into.

B. Reasons for joining the SHG

The major aim of the self-help groups is to promote saving and credit for the productive and consumption purposes. Table-II shows the reason for joining the SHG.

TABLE – II : REASONS FOR JOINING SHGS

S. No	Reasons	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	For Getting Loan	48	48
2	For Social Status	48	48
3	For other Reasons	4	4
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

In the study area many people (48 percent) join the SHG for getting financial assistance. 48 percent of the respondents join the SHGs for social status, because SHGs give the identity to the members.

Empowerment through self-help group

The Self-help group programme mainly focuses attention on empowerment of urban women and making them financially, socially and politically capable. Table-III, analyzes the extent of empowerment of self-help group women in the study area.

TABLE-III

EXTENT OF EMPOWERMENT AFTER FORMING/WORKING FOR SHGS

S. No	Indicators of Empowerment	Opinion			
		Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Total
1	Able to contribute towards the Family income	53	25	22	100
2	Skill up Graduation understand the banking operation	63	15	22	100
3	Improved standard of Living	72	12	16	100
4	Better Leadership and Communication	53	33	14	100
5	Awareness in health Education	37	22	41	100
6	Role in Decision making in household.	72	18	10	100

Source: Field Survey

It is clear that 53 percent of the respondents agree that they were able to contribute towards the family income, sixty three percent of the respondents agree that they have skill up gradation and understand the banking operation. Seventy two percent of the respondents agree that they have improved standard of living and 53 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that they have better leadership and communication, 37 percent of the respondents agree that they are having awareness in health education and 72 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that they have role in decision making.

D. Amount of loan availed by the members through SHG

The loan amount depends on the savings of the self-help group. The loan amount given to the self-help group is given in table-IV.

TABLE-IV : AMOUNT OF LOAN AVAILED BY THE MEMBERS THROUGH SHG

S.No	Loan amount (in rupees)	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Less than 5000	10	10
2.	5000-10000	12	12
3.	10,000-15,000	32	32
4.	15,000-20,000	18	18
5.	Above 20,000	18	18
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Table-IV, reveals that out of 100 respondents, 32 percent of the respondents have availed the loan of ` 10,000-15,000 and 18 per cent of the respondents have got loan of ` 20,000.

E. Type of activity

The self-help groups choose the income generating activity, which is most appropriate for them based on certain factors such as local resources available, the skill they are having, demand for the product and easy marketability. Table-V clearly explains the type of activity of the sample respondents.

TABLE-V : TYPE OF ACTIVITY

S.NO	Type of activity	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Textile business	23	23
2.	Petty shop	22	22
3.	Mess	10	10
4.	Fancy stores	22	22
5.	Tailoring	23	23
	Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

Majority of the SHG members (23 percent) were involved in textile business and tailoring. However only 10 percent were involved in the activity of running a mess.

F. Income, expenditure and saving of the respondents

i. Income of the respondents

The SHGs members' income has been increased after joining the SHGs. Hence women members in the group are now independent to meet their personal expenditure and they contribute more to their household income. Table-VI shows the monthly income of the members before and after joining SHGs.

TABLE-VI : MONTHLY INCOME OF THE SELF-HELP GROUP MEMBERS

S.NO	Monthly Income (in ₹)	Before joining SHGs		After joining SHGs	
		Number of respondents	Percentage	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Below 300	10	10	0	0
2	301-600	20	20	22	22
3	601-900	25	25	27	27
4	901-1200	20	20	21	21
5	Above 1200	25	25	30	30
	Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

The SHGs members' income has been increased after joining SHGs. The average income of women before joining SHG was ₹ 840 while it was ₹ 927 after joining SHG. There was significant difference in the income earned before and after joining SHG. since the calculated t value $7.56 > t_{0.05} = 2.13$.

G. Savings pattern

Table-VII depicts the saving pattern of the sample respondents.

TABLE-VII
SAVING PATTERN OF THE SAMPLE RESPONDENTS.

S.NO	Monthly Savings (₹)	Before Joining SHGs		After Joining SHGs	
		Number of respondents	Percentage	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Below 100	18	18	5	5
2	100-300	22	22	16	16
3	300-500	15	15	25	25
4	500-700	15	15	12	12
5	700-900	15	15	15	15
6	900-1100	10	10	10	10
7	Above 1100	15	15	17	17
	Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey

The overall savings of the member after joining SHGs worked out to be ₹ 630.5, while it was only ₹ 603 before joining SHG.

H. Benefits received by the respondents

Self-Help Group members' opinion about benefits received by them is given in the table-VIII.

TABLE -VIII: TYPE OF BENEFITS RECEIVED FROM SHGs

S. No.	Type of Benefits	Opinion			
		Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Total
1	Development of Savings among poor	75	5	20	100
2	Access to large quantum of Resources	32	25	43	100
3	Window for better Technology	37	33	30	100
4	Access to various promotional assistance	40	22	38	100

Source: Field Survey

Seventy five percent of the respondents were of the opinion that they have developed saving habits. 32 percent of the respondents agree that they have access to larger quantum of resources and 40 percent of the respondents agree that the self-help group has given its members access to various promotional assistance.

I. Problems faced by the respondents

An analysis was carried out to find out the various problem faced by the respondents. Using Garrett's Rating Scale technique, the problems were converted into scores. The scores assigned for different problems and the ranks given are shown in Table-IX

TABLE-IX : PROBLEMS OF THE RESPONDENTS

S. No	Problems	Mean Score	Rank
1	Lack of experience	48.5	1
2	Financial problem	45.85	2
3	Low Price and Profit	42.98	4
4	High Rate of Interest	42.79	5
5	Limited Support from Family	43.06	3
6	Work Not Regular	42.14	6

Source: Field Survey

Among the total samples surveyed, lack of experience was one of the problem, getting a mean score of 48.5 points. Financial problem was the next problem faced by the respondents with the mean score 45.85 points. The next problem they face was limited support from family with a mean score of 43.06 points. The problem of low price and profits had a mean score of 42.98 points.

CONCLUSION

1. Self Help Group has helped to improve the income earned by women.
2. Self Help Group are beneficial to women as it promotes savings
3. Self Help Group have helped to achieve women empowerment as it given confidence, economic independence to women and give them participation in decision making.

Recommended measures

1. For Self Help Group members, awareness about various economic activities can be propagated and
2. Non loan without procedural formalities can be provided.

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