

# Do Joining Self-help Groups (SHG) Enhances Female's Social and Economic Empowerment? - Evidence from the Pauri Block of Uttarakhand

OMEEN PANT<sup>1\*</sup> AND VIVEK NAITHANI<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>Research Scholar

Department of Economics, HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar (Uttarakhand) India

## ABSTRACT

Self-help Groups (SHGs) are informal associations of people who choose to come together to find ways to improve their living conditions. Females over the year have participated immensely in SHGs and with the start of bank linkage programme, SHG movement has become the world's largest microfinance project. SHG participation has improved the conditions of females in many aspects. The present paper tries to find the evidence of socio-economic empowerment of females due to SHG participation and thus 24 SHGs of Pauri block of Uttarakhand has been selected for study using Narayanswami and Gowda scale (2007). Study shows that SHG participation has enhanced economic empowerment more positively than social empowerment.

**Key Words :** Self-help groups, Economic empowerment, Female, Bank linkage programme

## INTRODUCTION

Living way, allocation of activities and norms heavily control the male and female lives in Indian society further curtailing women involvement in socio economic and political spheres. However, various programs of government of India have been working to unleash the innate capabilities of poor through livelihood enhancement, universal social mobilization and financial inclusion as it is believed that poor have strong desire to come out of poverty due to which they are willing to be organized. More likely, females organize and form a group together in order to address their common problems resulting in formation of self-helpgroups. Henceforth, women have formed the highest number (90%) of SHGs. Process involving inner conversion through internal power resulting in escalation of one's capacities; or power to aggregate mobilization of women along with men when possible is referred as empowerment. 5 P's which is process of, power within, power to, power with and power over

characterize the concept of empowerment for females in the existing society. (Lavoori and Paramanin, 2014). Social and economic empowerment holds a paramount role in the pursuit of a more just and equitable world. At its core, it is a powerful force for reducing the stark disparities in income, wealth, and access to resources that often characterize societies. By providing marginalized and disadvantaged groups with the tools, opportunities, and agency to improve their economic well-being, empowerment initiatives contribute significantly to poverty alleviation. This, in turn, not only enhances the quality of life for individuals and communities but also fuels broader economic development. Empowerment programs enable women to break free from traditional constraints, allowing them to participate actively in the workforce, access education, and make informed decisions about their lives. As a result, they become key contributors to economic growth and drivers of social change. Furthermore, empowerment initiatives extend

their reach to education and healthcare, ensuring that individuals have improved access to vital services. This, in turn, bolsters overall human development, promoting healthier, more educated, and economically productive populations. In a rapidly changing global landscape characterized by technological advancements and globalization, social and economic empowerment takes on added significance. It acknowledges that the benefits of economic progress must be distributed equitably to ensure social cohesion and stability. By fostering a sense of agency and inclusivity, empowerment initiatives empower individuals to shape their destinies, participate in decision-making processes, and hold governments and institutions accountable. In summary, the importance of social and economic empowerment lies in its potential to create more equitable, prosperous, and inclusive societies, serving as a catalyst for sustainable development and social justice on a global scale.

#### **Review of Literature:**

Das (2012) tested the psychological, social and economic empowerment of SHG members through MYRADA assessment tools and concluded that decision making ranks first followed by economic empowerment psychological empowerment confidence building and social empowerment respectively. Manish and Enid (2013) stated that women are more confident to earn and save more and participate in entrepreneurial activities after joining SHGs. Further, their dominance in decision making for education and purchase of durable goods have risen with slight increase in the authority to take their marriage decisions. Altogether there has been a improvement in economic conditions industrial skills social status and awareness in social problems in females of SHG. Saroj and Singh (2015) considered socio economic empowerment vital for development of women and pointed out towards its necessity for society as SHGs generate awareness in women regarding their rights and entitlements and leads to fruitful contribution of females in development programs and economic activities. Sailaja (2016) illustrated that income generating activities for females are mostly home based and its economic benefits resulted in house renovation land and ornament purchase and more consumption expenditure. Reduction in social evils and health problems and increase in leadership problem solving guidance decision making along with active participation in social activities empower members of self-help groups. Devi and Narasaiah (2017) asserted

that SHG members are empowered as they showed positive sign in decision making self-confidence problem solving quality of life and improvement in economic status. Micro finance is an eminent tool for female empowerment which if further exercised can result in eradication of poverty and problems of family. Sultana *et al.* (2017) mentioned that different members of Self-help groups have different intelligence understanding level, attitude and observation which impacts their empowerment intensity. Social empowerment in form of self-confidence courage and skill development is reflected through microfinance. Focus on microfinance will result in improvement of generic needs forsaking gender specific needs thus authors further stressed an hour need of combining microfinance programs with effort for health and education sector and monitor distribution of food for upliftment of marginalized women.

Tripathy (2017) stated that microfinance helps in attaining rural development and community participation for females further leading to qualitative improvement in lives of SHG females. Khan *et al.* (2020) assessed that economic political psychological empowerment is positive and moderate while social dimension has low impact in terms of empowerment through microfinance in Kashmir SHGs. Bhattacharya and Goswami (2020) in their insight from study of female domestic workers indicated low to moderate level of empowerment of female in survey and further need of social security support system. Shrinidhi and Thimmaiya (2020) has mentioned that SHG among tribal females have provided convenience in loan repayment and borrowing financial incentive easiness with transparency, increasing weekly saving and improved decision making due to financial independence. Rajagopal (2020) revealed that Neighborhood Groups (NHGs) have become socially empowered through social activities improvement and strengthened social bondage. Henceforth, there is an urgent need to further carry out SHGs work for social upliftment of females. Nada-Amer-Abdul hafedh Al Kubati and Doris Padmini Selvaratnam (2021) declared that SHG bank linkage program has built confidence and trust in females and empowered women of rural areas.

#### **Objectives:**

1. To analyze the economic empowerment of SHG female in the study area
2. To analyze the social empowerment of SHG female in the study area

## METHODOLOGY

Pauri block was purposively selected due to high number of functional SHG under it and SHG working under State Rural Livelihood Mission having functional existence of at least 3 years were considered for the survey and 24 SHGs from them were randomly selected. Further, two members each from these SHGs were randomly selected. Hence forth, the total sample size was 48. Social parameters included leadership, social recognition, social mobility and decision making while economic indicators were inclusive of income, employment, financial inclusion and capacity building as a parameter. Data collection was done through direct personal interview by using Narayanaswamy and Gowda (2007) scale. Each statement consisted of 5-point scale – strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, respectively. Statement was scored on the basis of these scores by multiplying obtained frequency by score obtained. Cumulative score of Statement was referred to as its performance score. Minimum attainable score was 21 and maximum attainable score was 105. The frequency percentage mean score and total weighted mean score was calculated for each statement and ranking was allotted according to it from highest to lowest.

Total Score (TS)= obtained frequency for each item  $\times$  score assigned for each item

Total weighted mean score = Mean score /Number

of respondents

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Table 1 shows that highest economic empowerment has been seen in increase in initiation to save more by the females followed by acquiring skill to do basic works using computer and internet and marketing the product after becoming members of SHG. Loaning from lenders has started declining with little change in the willingness to utilize it for productive purpose while females have become more able to channelize their own income in consumption but still less authoritative in mobilizing part of their income in investment expenditures of the family. Farm activities becoming more fruitful than non-farm activities for generating employment through SHG in the study area and increase in income level of the members is very low.

The Table 2 depicts that females s interacting with Govt. officials on social issues and regular participating in meetings of village along with visiting outside village and going on various field trips for acquiring information are highest social empowering factors for a female in the study area. Purchasing assets and becoming their owner together with female being as signed leadership position and gaining self-confidence when they started working in SHG shows a highlight of social empowerment in area. However, decision making for self-care and children education and marriage still remain a

**Table 1 : Economic Empowerment**

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	TS	TWMS	Rank
Initiated to save more after joining self-help groups	5 (10.4)	12 (25)	11 (22.9)	9 (18.8)	11 (22.9)	142	2.96	I
Perform basic operations of SHG through computer and internet	8(16.7)	13 (27.1)	9 (18.8)	13 (27.1)	5 (10.1)	133	2.77	II
Product marketing skill has improved after acquiring training	6 (12.5)	17 (35.4)	9 (18.8)	8 (16.7)	8 (16.7)	131	2.73	III
Frequency of lending money from moneylenders has decreased	9 (18.8)	14 (29.2)	6(12.5)	10 (20.8)	9(18.8)	131	2.73	III
Farm activities in SHG provided employment	6 (12.5)	15 (31.3)	17 (35.4)	7 (14.6)	3 (6.3)	127	2.65	IV
Mobilise own income in consumption expenditure of family	9 (18.8)	16 (33.3)	9(18.8)	12(25)	2(4.2)	124	2.58	V
Willingness to utilise loan for productive purposes improved	9(18.8)	15(31.3)	13(27.1)	6(12.5)	5(10.4)	122	2.54	VI
Non farm activities of SHG provided employment	10 (20.8)	16 (33.3)	8 (16.7)	9 (18.8)	5 (10.4)	122	2.54	VII
Mobilise own income in investment expenditure of family	11(22.9)	13(27.1)	14(29.2)	5(10.4)	5(10.4)	119	2.48	VIII
Increase in income level due to participation in SHG activities	12(25)	15(31.3)	9(18.8)	9(18.8)	3(6.3)	117	2.44	IX

**Table 2 : Social Empowerment**

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	TS	TWMS	Rank
Interacting with govt officials on social issues	7(14.6)	15(31.3)	9(18.8)	7(14.6)	10(20.8)	132	2.75	I
Active participation in village meetings for village issues	10(20.8)	14(29.2)	8(16.7)	8(16.7)	8(16.7)	126	2.63	II
Field tour to various places for knowledge gain	8(16.7)	13(27.1)	16(33.3)	4(8.3)	7(14.6)	126	2.63	II
Experiencing increased respect in the family	11 (22.9)	13(27.1)	10(20.8)	8(16.7)	6(12.5)	123	2.56	III
Visiting outside village for purchases and product marketing	6(12.5)	20(41.7)	11(22.9)	4(8.3)	7(14.6)	123	2.56	III
Gained self confidence after joining SHG	9(18.8)	16(33.3)	11 (22.9)	8(16.7)	4(8.3)	122	2.54	IV
Taken up leadership position in village or SHG	11(22.9)	13(27.1)	13(27.1)	3(6.3)	8(16.7)	120	2.50	V
Take decision for asset purchase and becoming their owner	11 (22.9)	14(29.2)	11(22.9)	6(12.5)	6(12.5)	120	2.50	V
Occasionally or frequently speaking in public meetings	14(29.2)	11 (27.1)	12 (25)	4(8.3)	7(14.6)	116	2.42	VI
Taking decision regarding own physical and mental health	10(20.8)	22 (45.8)	14 (29.2)	1(2.1)	1 (2.1)	104	2.17	VII
Make decision regarding children education and marriage	14 (29.2)	24(50)	6(12.5)	3(6.3)	1 (2.1)	96	2.00	VIII

lacking factor for females in society.

**Conclusion:**

SHG participation has enhanced economic empowerment more positively than social empowerment which is evident from the table that economic indicators are well above the mean score (2.56). In terms of economic empowerment saving and digital literacy has improved while role of female’s own income in the family investment basket and overall increase in income due to SHG activities is not satisfactory. Social empowerment has also seen a positive impact where female participation in community issues has increased while they still lack decision making power regarding asset ownership, own physical and mental health and at the same time male still have major voice regarding children’s education and their marriage.

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