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Study of economic and political empowerment of women self-help groups in locality of Mahasamund district of C.G.

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Abstract

This study explores the empowerment of rural women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Mahasamund district, Chhattisgarh, which has the second-highest number of women SHGs in the state. The study involved 120 women members from 12 SHGs across two blocks, Basna and Pithora. Data were collected by using a structured interview schedule and analyzed using various statistical methods. Significant improvements were observed in the empowerment of women across economic, and political dimensions after joining SHGs. economic empowerment increases from 35.20% to 71.87% (36.67% change), and political empowerment increases from 41.11% to 68.61% (27.50% change). These findings highlight the transformative impact of SHGs on the empowerment of rural women in various aspects of life.

Keywords: Empowerment, rural women, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Mahasamund district, economic empowerment, political empowerment

Introduction

Women are crucial to the development of society, contributing significantly to social, economic, and cultural growth, particularly in rural areas where they play a key role during crop seasons, often without compensation. The United Nations Population Fund's 2023 report states that women represent 49.60% of the global population, and in India, women make up 48.40% of the total population. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's Periodic Labour Force Survey (2022-23), female labour force participation has increased from 32.80% in 2021-22 to 37.00% in 2022-23.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been instrumental in empowering women. These groups, supported by organizations like NABARD and NGOs, have enhanced women's economic, social, and political empowerment. In India, there are over 84 lakh SHGs, with most being women-led. In Chhattisgarh, women-led SHGs make up a

significant portion, and the state has 2.59 lakh SHGs with 26.53 lakh members. These groups encourage savings, income-generating activities, and access to financial services. The SHG-Bank Linkage Program and government schemes like SGSY and NRLM have further empowered women by promoting self-employment, skill development, and access to resources.

SHGs enable women to take control of their financial decisions, improve social networks, and create livelihood opportunities. The Economic Survey 2023 highlights the positive impact of SHGs on women's empowerment. During crises like COVID-19, women-led SHGs played a vital role in producing masks, sanitizers, and other essential supplies. Overall, SHGs have helped elevate rural women's living standards, promote financial independence, improve healthcare, and foster leadership and social justice, contributing to rural development and women's empowerment.

Methodology

Mahasamund district in Chhattisgarh, with the second highest number of Women SHGs in the state, was purposively selected for this study. The district has five blocks, out of which two blocks namely Basna and Pithora were chosen due to having the highest number of women SHGs. Six villages from each block (12 villages total) were selected for the study, with one self-help group from each village. In total, 12 SHGs were chosen, each with 10 respondents, resulting in 120 women members being part of the study. Data was collected personally by using a pre-tested structured interview schedule. The data were analysed by using, weightage, frequency, percentage, SD, average and correlation.

Results and Discussion

Empowerment of rural women through Self-help group activities

Empowerment of rural women is analyzed through empowerment level before and after joining the SHG with mean differences under various indicators.

1. Economic Empowerment of rural women through self-help groups activities

After joining SHGs, economic indicators showed significant improvement. Annual income increased from 40.83% to 73.33% (mean difference: 32.50%), while freedom to start a business rose from 30.83% to 58.33% (mean difference: 27.50%). Employment opportunities grew from 35.83% to 78.33% (mean difference: 42.50%), and savings increased from 33.33% to 77.50% (mean difference: 44.17%).

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their Economic Empowerment compared before and after joining SHGs

S. No.	Economic empowerment	Before joining		After joining		Change (Mean difference)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Increase in income of rural women	49	40.83	88	73.33	39	32.50
2.	Freedom to start any Business	37	30.83	70	58.33	33	27.50
3.	Increase in employment opportunity	43	35.83	94	78.33	51	42.50
4.	Increase in money-saving	40	33.33	93	77.50	53	44.17
	Overall	169		345		176	

Economic empowerment index

Before joining SHG $169 \div 480 \times 100 = 35.20$

After joining SHG $345 \div 480 \times 100 = 71.87$

Table 1.1: Economic empowerment of women through self-help groups (SHGs) based on empowerment indicators

S. No.	Empowerment indicators	Index		Change in Empowerment
		Before Joining	After joining	
1.	Economic empowerment	35.20	71.87	36.67

Table 2.1: Political empowerment of women through self-help groups (SHGs) based on empowerment indicators

S. No.	Empowerment indicators	Index		Change in Empowerment
		Before Joining	After joining	
1.	Political empowerment	41.11	68.61	27.50

2. Political Empowerment of rural women through self-help groups activities

After joining SHG, leadership quality improved by 30%, political awareness increased by 25.83%, and political party membership rose by 26.67%.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their political empowerment compared before and after joining SHGs

S. No.	Political empowerment	Before joining		After joining		Change (Mean difference)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Improving leadership quality	48	40.00	84	70.00	36	30.00
2.	Awareness of political news	49	40.83	80	66.67	31	25.83
3.	Membership in political party	51	42.50	83	69.17	32	26.67
	Overall	148		247		99	

Political empowerment index

Before joining SHG $148 \div 360 \times 100 = 41.11$

After joining SHG $247 \div 360 \times 100 = 68.61$

Conclusion

Self-help group (SHG) activities have significantly empowered rural women economically and politically. Economic indicators show notable improvements, including increased income (32.50%), greater business freedom (27.50%), enhanced employment opportunities (42.50%), and higher savings (44.17%). The economic empowerment index rose from 35.20% to 71.87% (36.67% increased). Similarly, political empowerment improved, with leadership qualities rising by 30%, political awareness by 25.83%, and party membership by 26.67%. The political empowerment index increased from 41.11% to 68.61% (27.50% rise). Overall, SHGs have played a transformative role in enhancing rural women's financial independence and political participation, fostering self-reliance and governance involvement.

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