



Social Empowerment of Rural Women through Self Help Groups: A Study in Gujarat State

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ABSTRACT

The present investigation was carried out in Gir Somnath district of Gujarat State. Five talukas of Gir Somnath district were purposively selected where Self-Help Groups (SHGs) formed under Ambuja Cement Foundation and Krishi Vigyan Kendra. A total of 79 SHGs were formed in these five talukas. Villages with more than eight SHGs and those engaging in income-generating activities for more than three years were included. From each village, 25 SHG and 25 non-SHG woman members were selected for the study. Thus, the total sample size of members was 500. The results revealed that the independent sample 'Z' test showed a significant difference in the mean values of SHG members and non-SHG members in case of social status, communication ability, mass media exposure, and extension contact.

Key Words: Rural Women, Self Help Groups, Social empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Self-help groups play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality by elevating the status of women as active participants, decision-makers, and beneficiaries across democratic, economic, social, and cultural domains. The involvement of women becomes indispensable at every stage of economic and social endeavors. These groups actively encourage women to engage in the socio-economic advancement of our nation. By empowering women to take on active roles, self-help groups unlock the potential for women to shape their communities positively and foster entrepreneurial initiatives among them. Self-help groups (SHGs) provide credit access to the impoverished, which is paramount in alleviating poverty.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are also instrumental in driving societal development, particularly in empowering women. They enable women to come together, confront challenges, and tackle various socio-economic issues. With the support of microfinance provided by banks, SHGs attain financial stability and enhance strategic

planning. Thus, this study explored that how participation in self-help groups facilitated the social empowerment of rural women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study focused on the Gir Somnath district in Gujarat state. Five out of the district's six talukas were purposively selected, as these areas had Self-Help Groups (SHGs) formed under the Ambuja Cement Foundation and Krishi Vigyan Kendra. In total, SHGs were established in 79 villages across these five talukas. Among these, 10 villages were chosen based on the criterion of having more than eight SHGs actively engaged in livelihood activities for over three years. From each selected village, 25 SHG women members were randomly chosen, along with 25 non-SHG women members, for a comparative study. This resulted in a total sample size of 500 SHG and Non SHG members. Data collections were performed conducted through personal interviews utilizing a pre-tested structured schedule. The data were processed, tabulated, classified, analyzed, and subjected to statistical analysis to assess the impact of self-help groups on the social empowerment of

women. For measuring social empowerment the scale developed by Bariya (2016) was used as under followed.

Change in social status

The statements regarding change in

social status were prepared. The respondents were asked to give their reply in yes or no. The score of 1 and 0 was assigned for yes or no answer to each statement, respectively. The score on each statement was added to obtain final score indicating change in social status of the peasant.

The respondents were grouped into five categories for change in social status as under:

Sr. No.	Category	Score
1	Very less	(0.0 to 1.8 score)
2	Less	(1.9 to 3.6 score)
3	Medium	(3.7 to 5.4 score)
4	High	(5.5 to 7.2 score)
5	Very High	(Above 7.2 score)

Communication ability

Five statements regarding communication ability were included in the study. The respondents were asked to give the answer to each statement.

This referred to the frequency of interactions with others by the peasant. This variable was quantified by assigning score as follows:

Sr. No.	Frequency of communication ability	Score
1	Never	0
2	Occasionally	1
3	Sometime	2
4	Always	3

On the basis of arbitrary method, the respondents were grouped into the following five categories:

Sr. No.	Category	Score
1	Very less	(0.0 to 03.0 score)
2	Less	(3.1 to 06.0 score)
3	Medium	(6.1 to 09.0 score)
4	High	(9.1 to 12.0 score)
5	Very High	(Above 12.0 score)

Mass media exposure

Mass media exposure referred to the frequency of reading news paper, listening to radio broadcast, viewing to television telecast and cinema. To know the mass media exposure of the

respondents scale adopted by Kamat (1993) was used. The total score was calculated for each respondent by summing up the score of all statements. The respondents were grouped into five categories for mass media exposure as under:

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Sr. No.	Category	Score
1	Very Less	(00.0 to 08.0 score)
2	Less	(08.1 to 16.0 score)
3	Medium	(16.1 to 24.0 score)
4	High	(24.1 to 32.0 score)
5	Very High	(Above 32.0 score)

Extension contact

This referred to the frequency with which women came in contact with the extension agent's viz. VLWs, extension officer, taluka development officer, scientists of agriculture University, government officers of different departments, private veterinary doctors, members of cooperative societies and bank officers. The respondents were asked to indicate their

frequency of their contact with each extension agent on a five point continuum viz. weekly, fortnightly, monthly, half-yearly and never with scores of 4, 3, 2, 1 and 0 respectively. The total score for each respondent was obtained by adding the scores for all the contacts made with the extension agents for getting information. The respondents were categorized in five groups as under.

Sr. No.	Category	Score
1	Very Less	(00.0 to 08.0 score)
2	Less	(08.1 to 16.0 score)
3	Medium	(16.1 to 24.0 score)
4	High	(24.1 to 32.0 score)
5	Very High	(Above 32.0 score)

Table 1. The respondents according to their social status. (n = 500)

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Sr. No.	Category	SHG members (n = 250)		Non-SHG members (n = 250)	
		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
1.	Very low	43	17.20	58	23.20
2.	Low	57	22.80	105	42.00
3.	Medium	85	34.00	87	34.80
4.	High	44	17.60	00	00.00
5.	Very high	21	08.40	00	00.00
	Total : -	250	100.00	250	100.00
	Mean	3.77		2.85	
	'Z' value	5.092**			
** Significant at 0.01 level of probability.					

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social status

Social status pertains to the position individuals occupy within a society, which can vary based on different factors. At any given time, individuals typically hold multiple social statuses.

These statuses can be categorized into three types: Achieved status, which is earned through personal merit; Ascribed status, which is assigned to individuals by virtue of their birth or inherent characteristics; and Master status, which represents the most significant social status individuals hold.

Table 2. The respondents according to their communication ability.

(n = 500)

Sr. No.	Category	SHG members (n = 250)		Non-SHG members (n = 250)	
		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
1.	Very low	00	00.00	00	00.00
2.	Low	84	33.60	101	40.40
3.	Medium	52	20.80	143	57.20
4.	High level	70	28.00	06	02.40
5.	Very high	44	17.60	00	00.00
Total :-		250	100.00	250	100.00
Mean		9.11		6.74	
'Z' value		11.15**			
** Significant at 0.01 level of probability.					

Perusal of Table 1 revealed that 51.60 percent of SHG woman members exhibited a medium to high level of social status, while 22.80 percent had a low level of social status. Furthermore, 17.20 percent were observed with a very low level of social status, and 8.40 percent were categorized with a very high level of social status. Conversely, among non-SHG woman members, it was noted that 42.00 percent had a low level of social status, followed by 34.80 percent with a medium level of social status. Interestingly, none of them were found to have high or very high levels of social status. The mean values regarding social status for both groups of respondents indicate minimal disparity between their social status levels. However, the independent sample 'Z' test revealed a highly significant difference in the mean values of social status between SHG woman members and non-SHG woman members. Findings suggested that the majority of SHG members had medium to low levels of social status, whereas non-SHG women predominantly exhibited low to very low levels of social status. This trend may be attributed to factors such as limited education, modest economic conditions, a moderate to low level of risk orientation and innovativeness, and in both groups, some respondents living below the poverty line. The similar finding were also confirmed by Shambharkar *et al* (2012), Bariya *et al* (2020), Bariya *et al* (2021) and Bariya *et al* (2022).

Communication ability

Particularly, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a pivotal role in bolstering communication and interpersonal skills among women, thereby improving their overall performance across all activities.

There are many successful initiatives for successful use of media one of such initiative is establishment of the community "Lokvani FM radio" station at KVK. This station broadcasts agriculture and allied field programs to surrounding villages within a 15 km radius. Women speakers engage with female villagers, addressing common issues for their upliftment. Furthermore, the utilization of internet facilities plays a crucial role in the rural upliftment, particularly benefiting women who are integral to rural communities.

Table 2 displays data indicating that among SHG woman members, 33.60 per cent had a low level of communication ability, followed by 28.00 per cent with a very high level, 20.80 per cent with a medium level, and 17.60 per cent with a high level of communication ability. Notably, none of them exhibited a very low level of communication ability. Conversely, among non-SHG members, the majority (57.20 per cent) had a medium level of communication ability, with 40.40 per cent displaying a low level and 2.40 per cent showing a high level of ability. Notably, none of the non-SHG members exhibited very low or

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Table 3. The respondents according to their mass media exposure.

(n = 500)

Sr. No.	Category	SHG members (n = 250)		Non-SHG members (n = 250)	
		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
1.	Very low	108	43.20	231	92.40
2.	Low	91	36.40	19	07.60
3.	Medium	51	20.40	00	00.00
4.	High	00	00.00	00	00.00
5.	Very high	00	00.00	00	00.00
Total :-		250	100.00	250	100.00
Mean		13.93		7.38	
'Z' value		6.55**			
** Significant at 0.01 level of probability.					

Table 4 : The respondents according to their extension contact

(n =500)

Sr. No.	Category	SHG members (n = 250)		Non-SHG members (n = 250)	
		Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
1.	Very low	101	40.40	207	82.80
2.	Low	40	16.00	43	17.20
3.	Medium	109	43.60	00	00.00
4.	High level	00	00.00	00	00.00
5.	Very high	00	00.00	00	00.00
	Total :-	250	100.00	250	100.00
	Mean	11.2		6.12	
	'Z' value	16.36**			

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability.

very high levels of communication ability. Mean values for communication ability across both groups highlighted significant differences, indicating a substantial variation in communication ability levels among SHG and non-SHG woman members. An independent sample 'Z' test confirmed a highly significant difference in mean values between the two groups regarding communication ability.

It was concluded that SHG members typically have greater opportunities for engagement with leaders, VLWs, bankers, government officials, political figures, and NGO volunteers compared to non-SHG members. This enhanced interaction enables SHG members to articulate their concerns effectively and enhances their self-confidence. Conversely, non-SHG

women members engage in information exchange, albeit their primary aim was to establish connections with others. However, the scope for conversation among non-SHG women is comparatively limited. This finding was supported with Mehta *et al.* (2011), Singh *et al.* (2012) Bariya *et al.* (2020), Bariya *et al.* (2021) and Bariya *et al.* (2022).

Mass media exposure

Exposure to communication channels facilitates the acquisition of general awareness and provides access to scientific and technical information, thus playing a pivotal role in enhancing socio-economic standards. Information on mass media exposure was gathered by assessing respondents' interactions with various media platforms such as newspapers,

radio, television, films, the internet, WhatsApp, and the I-kisan portal. Trained personnel could assist rural women in navigating computers and mobile devices through initiatives like Krishi Mobile Seva. Establishing knowledge resource centers or information booths in local languages, focusing on crop-specific issues, and problem-solving at the village level can empower individuals to take initiative. Over the past five years, "Lokvani Radio," operated through KVK at Ambujanagar, has successfully broadcasted programs on agriculture and related subjects, contributing to knowledge dissemination in the community.

Table 3 reveals that slightly over two-fifths (43.20 %) of SHG woman members had a very low level of mass media exposure, followed by more than one-third (36.40 %) with a low level, and 20.40 per cent with a medium level. Notably, none of them reported high or very high levels of mass media exposure. Conversely, among non-SHG members, the majority (92.40 %) had a very low level of exposure, with 7.60 per cent reporting a low level. None of the non-SHG members indicated medium, high, or very high levels of exposure. Mean values for mass media exposure across both groups highlight significant differences, indicating substantial variation between the two categories of woman members. An independent sample 'Z' test confirmed a highly significant difference in mean values between SHG and non-SHG woman members regarding mass media exposure.

It can be inferred (Table 3) that the likely factors contributing to this situation include low to medium levels of education, poor economic conditions, and medium to low levels of self-esteem. Additionally, the limited availability of essential mass media platforms such as radio, newspapers, television, farm magazines, internet, and WhatsApp among both groups may also contribute to the observed differences in mass media exposure. This finding is similar with the finding reported by Verma *et al* (2013), Bariya *et al* (2020), Bariya *et al* (2021) and Bariya *et al* (2022).

Extension contact

Extension contact entails the frequency of interactions initiated by women with various extension agencies or workers, both within and outside their village. These interactions are crucial for gathering and comprehending the latest information pertaining to their profession and new government schemes

The data (Table 4) illustrated that slightly over two-fifths (43.60 %) of SHG woman members reported a medium level of extension contact, followed by 40.40 per cent with a very low level, and 16.00 per cent with a low level. Notably, none of them indicated high or very high levels of extension contact. In contrast, among non-SHG woman members, the majority (82.80 %) reported a very low level of extension contact, with none reporting medium, high, or very high levels. Mean values regarding extension contact for both respondent groups highlighted significant differences, indicating notable variations in extension contact levels between SHG and non-SHG woman members. The independent sample 'Z' test confirms a highly significant difference in mean values between the two groups regarding extension contact.

These findings suggested that SHG members have more opportunities to engage with extension functionaries compared to non-SHG respondents, motivating them to take proactive steps towards their social empowerment. The prevalence of medium-level extension contact among the majority of beneficiaries may be attributed to frequent visits by Ambuja Cement Foundation and Krishi Vigyan Kendra staff to the villages, regular meetings, vocational training sessions, and short-duration training programs. Beneficiaries likely demonstrate interest in gaining knowledge or acquiring new skills, knowing that these extension contacts contribute to their welfare by providing recent information and clarifying doubts. However, some beneficiaries and non-SHG members reported low extension contact, possibly due to lack of interest or ignorance regarding the benefits associated with such interactions. This finding was

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somewhat agreement with the findings of Sowjanya (2007), Bariya *et al* (2020), Bariya *et al* (2021) and Bariya *et al* (2022).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlighted a notable disparity between SHG and non-SHG woman members. Consequently, it is crucial for the government to prioritize the establishment of self-help groups within relevant institutions. Furthermore, organizing awareness and training programs is essential to emphasize the importance of this microfinance initiative in rural areas for fostering women's empowerment.

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