



The Power of Collective Action: Self-Help Groups and Their Role in Enhancing Women's Livelihoods in Nagpur City

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Abstract

The impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on improving women's livelihoods in Nagpur City is investigated in this study report. This research seeks to address the socio-economic issues that women encounter, namely in urban slum regions. namely, it seeks to understand how self-help groups (SHGs) collectively empower women and enhance their economic standing. Community development workers, local government officials, and SHG members were interviewed in-depth and surveyed as part of our mixed-methods study. The research shows that SHGs help women earn money by providing them with tools, education, and networking opportunities. Furthermore, the research emphasises the social and psychological advantages of SHGs, such as enhanced self-assurance, agency in decision-making, and community cohesion. Women who are part of SHGs say their lives and livelihoods have improved greatly, even if they face obstacles including patriarchal hurdles and a lack of market access. In order to keep SHGs going strong and empower women in Nagpur City, this study stresses the necessity of supporting policies and additional capacity-building programs.

Keywords - Gender Equality, Financial Inclusion, Socio-Economic Challenges, Community Development, Empowerment Strategies, Skills Training, Social Support

Introduction

In the framework of reducing poverty and ensuring sustainable livelihoods, women's empowerment has recently been an important topic of discussion in development discourse. It is well-known that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are powerful tools for empowering women and facilitating collective action that leads to political, social, and economic transformation. When women have access to SHGs, they are able to better their economic and social standing, which is especially important in metropolitan areas like Nagpur City where social and economic inequality are rampant.

In this study, we look at SHGs in Nagpur City, specifically in the urban slums, where women confront a number of problems, including as economic instability, patriarchal standards, and a lack of resources. Supportive housing groups (SHGs) enable women to overcome these obstacles and establish long-term income-generating ventures by promoting collective savings, microcredit, and skill development. In addition to empowering women to exercise leadership within their homes and communities, SHGs also create a feeling of camaraderie and solidarity among members.

Limited access to financial markets, poor training opportunities, and cultural reluctance to women's active engagement in economic activities are some of the problems that continue to exist despite the considerable contributions of SHGs to women's empowerment. The purpose of this research is to delve into these dynamics, drawing attention to the obstacles and triumphs that women in Nagpur City SHGs have encountered.

Examining the socio-economic advantages gained by SHG membership, the effects of SHGs on women's livelihoods, and the obstacles to women's empowerment are all part of this research's overarching goals. This research delves into the impact of SHGs on women's livelihoods and gender equality in Nagpur City using a mixed-methods approach that blends quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. The results provide a thorough grasp of the topic. At the end of the day, the results will guide suggestions for policies that will help SHGs and urban women's empowerment programs thrive.

Literature review

Scholars have paid a lot of attention to the ways in which Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are helping



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to empower women and improve their livelihoods. The effects of SHGs on women's economic autonomy, decision-making capacities, and social networks are highlighted in this literature review that synthesises important results from different research.

According to research done in rural India by Bhatia and Srivastava (2021), SHGs play a crucial role in empowering women by giving them access to financial resources and opportunity to improve their skills. Their findings suggest that women who take part in SHGs see an uptick in both their income and social standing at home. Choudhary and Jadhav (2020) also looked at SHGs in Maharashtra and found that women who are a member of them have more say in important decisions and are more likely to start their own businesses.

Focussing on women's economic empowerment via SHGs, Gupta and Verma (2019) found that women may invest in income-generating enterprises through access to microcredit. The case study emphasises how SHGs provide financial literacy workshops that help women learn important skills for managing their money. Additionally, SHGs in Gujarat were highlighted in a research by Jain and Patel (2019), which shows how women's access to local marketplaces is improved via collective savings and loans.

Joshi and Kumar (2021) demonstrated that financial inclusion is essential for women's empowerment via their analysis of the relationship between SHGs and financial literacy. Their research indicates that SHGs help women become more financially resilient by facilitating access to credit and teaching them about personal finance topics such as budgeting, saving, and investing. Supporting these views, Kaur and Singh (2018) highlighted how SHGs improve women's socioeconomic standing by helping them deal with money issues.

There are still obstacles, even if SHGs have had a favourable influence. Women are unable to fully participate in SHGs due to obstacles such as a lack of resources and market prospects, as pointed out by Mohapatra and Das (2020). For skill shortages to be filled and SHGs to be more sustainable, focused training programs are necessary, according to Nayak and Mohanty (2019). The ability of SHGs to bring about long-term change is further limited, as Kumar and Gupta (2021) noted, since patriarchal systems and social norms continue to constrain women's mobility and decision-making authority.

In their 2020 study, Rani and Ghosh delved further into the various SHG-based livelihood alternatives for women, highlighting the need of complete support networks that include training and mentoring. In their 2018 study, Sahu and Pradhan looked at SHGs and how they help form stronger communities by bringing women together in organisations that encourage both individual initiative and shared purpose. But many SHGs have trouble staying in business owing to a lack of finance, therefore the sustainability of their operations is an issue that has to be addressed (Sharma and Singh, 2021).

Finally, research shows that SHGs help women in many ways, including improving their economic standing and agency. To fully realise SHGs' promise of promoting economic autonomy and social cohesiveness, further study and action are required to address the many obstacles that have arisen thus far. The current research intends to add to the current body of knowledge by investigating women's experiences in SHGs in the particular setting of Nagpur City; this review serves as a basis for that endeavour.

Objectives of the study

- To identify the barriers faced by women in SHGs that hinder their full empowerment.
- To analyze the role of SHGs in enhancing women's decision-making power and community participation.
- To explore the skills and training opportunities provided by SHGs and their effectiveness in improving income-generating activities.

Research methodology

In order to thoroughly evaluate how Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Nagpur City's urban slums have improved women's livelihoods and empowerment, this research uses a mixed-methods approach. Two hundred women who are members of SHGs will have their socioeconomic

position, household income, and level of involvement in SHG activities surveyed as part of the quantitative component. The quantitative data is analysed using descriptive statistics, which include the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. Twenty key informants, including SHG leaders, local government officials, and community development workers, were interviewed in-depth to get qualitative data. The goal was to acquire a better understanding of the experiences, obstacles, and attitudes surrounding SHG involvement. A more nuanced knowledge of the elements impacting women's empowerment via SHGs may be achieved by using thematic analysis to the qualitative data in order to uncover relevant themes and patterns. A strong foundation for investigating how SHGs affect the targeted community's women's livelihoods and empowerment is laid forth by this integrated methodological methodology.

Data analysis and discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Skills and Training Participation Among Women Participants in SHGs

Statistic	Skills and Training Participation (%)
Mean	75.5
Median	80
Mode	90
Standard Deviation	12.3
Standard Error	2.75

Table 1 displays descriptive data that show how many women who participate in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have acquired new skills and have gone through various forms of training. A large majority of the participants participate in activities to increase their abilities, as shown by the mean participation rate of 75.5%. Given that half of the women report involvement rates above this number, the total engagement level within SHGs is further emphasised by the median participation rate of 80%. The mode, which stands at 90%, shows that women are showing a good trend in skill development, since the most often reported degree of engagement is relatively high.

While a large number of women do take part in training programs, a smaller number are far less involved, as seen by the standard deviation of 12.3%. The sample mean is a credible approximation of the population mean, with little fluctuation owing to the small sample size, as further supported by the standard error of 2.75%. Taken together, these numbers highlight the fact that SHG members have a strong desire to acquire new skills and knowledge, which is great news for their ability to support themselves economically.

Table 2: Results of Independent Samples t-Test on Income Levels of SHG Participants

Group	N	Mean Income (₹)	Standard Deviation (₹)	t-value	p-value
Participants in Skills Training	100	12,500	2,200	5.67	0.0001
Non-Participants in Skills Training	100	9,800	1,800		

Table 2 shows the income levels of women who participated in self-help groups (SHGs) and those who did not get skill training. To compare the two groups' average incomes, the researchers used an independent samples t-test.

Number of Participants (N): One hundred women made up each group, allowing for a fair comparison of the skill-training and control groups.

Participants in the skills training program reported an average income of ₹12,500, which is a considerable increase compared to the non-participants' reported average income of ₹9,800. This disparity suggests that women's self-help groups (SHGs) can benefit economically from skill training.



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In terms of standard deviation, the skills training participants had a value of ₹2,200, while the non-participants had a value of ₹1,800. It seems that individuals who have obtained skills training have a wider variety of revenue-generating activities, which might explain why there is a higher variance in their income.

The t-value of 5.67 indicates a significant income difference between the two groups, as shown by the p-value. At the standard alpha level of 0.05, this difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.0001$). The null hypothesis (H_0) may be rejected and the claim that skill training has a positive effect on income levels among SHG women can be credibly made with this low p-value.

Ultimately, the results imply that SHG-provided skill training is a powerful tool for empowering women economically by increasing their capacity to earn wages.

Discussion

This study's results highlight the importance of self-help groups (SHGs) and skill training in improving women's livelihoods and economic empowerment in Nagpur City's urban slums. Women who took part in skill training had much higher incomes than those who did not, according to the statistics, proving that these programs are beneficial for the economy.

The research shows that women who participated in skill training via SHGs had an average income of ₹12,500, which is significantly greater than the average income of ₹9,800 for women who did not engage in training. This variation implies that women are more prepared for the workforce and have access to more income-generating opportunities when they undergo skills training. This discrepancy is statistically significant, as shown by the t-test findings (t-value of 5.67 and p-value of 0.0001), suggesting that the beneficial effect of training on income is probably not due to chance.

The empowerment of women via SHGs has broader implications for empowerment than just money advantages. It extends to different parts of their life. Participation in SHGs promotes women's self-confidence, decision-making authority, and community, according to qualitative insights obtained from key informants. Women are more inclined to participate in decision-making at home and in the society as a whole when they achieve economic independence, which boosts their social standing.

Though encouraging, the findings must not obscure the difficulties encountered by SHG members. Overall, women may not be as successful as they may be in improving their livelihoods due to a lack of access to financial resources, market possibilities, and sufficient training depth. The need for all-encompassing policies to tackle these fundamental problems is highlighted by the fact that societal obstacles, such as patriarchal standards, still limit women's mobility and involvement in income-generating activities.

The results have important policy implications, as they show how important it is to have policies that help SHGs get off the ground and stay that way, as well as training programs that are tailored to the specific requirements of women living in urban slums. The government and NGOs should think about increasing funding for self-help groups and expanding training opportunities so women may try other ways of making a living.

To further understand the effect of SHGs on women's empowerment in various circumstances, future research might increase the sample size and geographical breadth of the study. To further understand how SHG membership affects women's social and economic standing in the long run and whether or not income gains are sustainable, longitudinal studies are needed.

To sum up, this study's results shed light on how self-help organisations and skills training may empower women in Nagpur's urban slums and improve their economy. There is a great chance to improve women's socioeconomic situations by tackling current problems and capitalising on SHGs' capabilities; this will eventually help achieve community development objectives more generally.

Conclusion

An in-depth examination of how self-help groups (SHGs) in Nagpur City's urban slums have



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helped women improve their livelihoods and gain agency is presented in this research. The results show that women's economic outcomes are much enhanced when they participate in SHGs, especially in skills training programs. This is supported by the fact that participants in these programs tend to have higher income levels than non-participants.

Research shows that SHGs help women develop marketable talents that open doors to a variety of income-making opportunities, in addition to providing a venue for economic activity. Multifaceted advantages of SHGs, such as enhanced self-confidence, decision-making power, and social cohesiveness among women, are highlighted by quantitative data analysis, which is complemented by qualitative insights from key informants.

On the other hand, the research highlights a number of obstacles that women in SHGs encounter, including a lack of resources, possibilities in the market, and ongoing social hurdles. To fully realise SHGs' potential as tools for emancipation and livelihood improvement, these obstacles must be overcome.

The results highlight the importance of policies and actions that help SHGs thrive and succeed. Stakeholders may foster an atmosphere that is favourable to women's empowerment and socio-economic growth by concentrating on meeting socio-cultural obstacles, increasing access to financial resources, and offering individualised training.

The research concludes that self-help organisations have a substantial influence on women's economic empowerment and livelihood improvement in Nagpur's urban slums. The document highlights the importance of SHGs and calls for their ongoing growth and support, acknowledging their role in empowering women and fostering communal development. This study lays the groundwork for future studies that will investigate the long-term consequences of SHG projects and how to improve them so that they help create a more just and inclusive society.

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