

An Empirical Study of Self-helps Groups and Awareness of Group Members

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Abstract

Self-help groups, as it evident from research studies, are instrumental in creating awareness and socio-economic development of group members and their families. The groups are formed and run on democratic principles. Generally, homogeneous groups of the same socio-economic background are preferred to avoid conflicting interests. However, no discrimination is allowed on the basis of gender, caste, creed or religion for membership. SHGs are formed and nourished by Self-help Group Promotional Institutions (SHPIs), financed by Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) for undertaking micro-entrepreneurial activities. The basic principle of self-help group is transparency at all levels of activities which promotes trust and mutual understanding among the members of the group. A sample of 219 group members of 73 self-help groups, promoted by three NGOs working in Beed, Jalana and Osmanabad districts from Marathwada Region of Maharashtra state, was selected on Convenience sampling basis. Out of 219 group members, 146 (67%) were male members whereas 73 (33%) were female members. The study attempted to investigate into the questions as to which factors influenced the members for joining the SHGs? Was there any association between male/female group members and their awareness about financial, administrative, social, political and entrepreneurial activities? The study observed that the group members were influenced by the group activities such as, savings, micro finance without collateral, micro entrepreneurial activities and self-respect and self-confidence they had got being group members. The major conclusion of the study is that there was significant association between gender of the group members and awareness about financial, political activities. However, the gender of the group members and their awareness about administrative, social and entrepreneurial activities were found independent of each other.

Key words: Savings, NGOs, MFIs, Entrepreneurial activities, Sustainable development

JEL Classification: E21,L31, G21, L26, Q 01

Introduction

Self-help Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP) has a unique place in micro finance sector in India. Indian experience about microfinance is promising and it can become a national movement (Srnivasan, G. 2002). As on 31st March, 2014, there were 74. 29 lakh savings linked groups in India and the aggregate deposit mobilization by these groups amounted to Rs.9897.42 crore. Indian banks have been playing a very crucial role in supporting SBLP through credit linkage of groups. As a result of it, 41.97 lakh groups were credit linked and the credit support to groups amounted to Rs.42,927.52 crore. SBLP is an effective tool for the socio-economic empowerment of poor. So far, 97 million households have been covered under this programme. Women groups accounted 84.14 percent and 81.15 percent of the aggregate savings linked and credit linked groups respectively (Micro finance Status in India, NABARD Report, 2013-14). In terms of reaching physical targets, the SBLP seems to have done quite impressively and has a huge potential for banking with the poor (Shylendra, H.S., 2004). SHGs are formed and nourished by Self-help Group Promotional Institutions (SHPIs), financed by Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) for undertaking micro-entrepreneurial activities. The basic principle of self-help group is transparency at all levels of activities which promotes trust and mutual understanding among the members of the group.

Literature review

Research scholars have studied and highlighted on significant aspects of Self-help groups and their impact on group members. Chakraborty (2011) inferred that the growth of SHGs helps to alleviate the poverty as the SHGs members are self employed and able to earn their livelihood. SHGs played a

major role in social and economic empowerment of group members. Srivastava (2012) noticed that rural people (contacted) were not satisfied with banking correspondent model and because of high collateral requirement; they had to resort to local moneylenders. Shantana (2003) found that micro finance programme was instrumental in reducing poverty by seven percent. Kumaran (2002) observed in his study that more than 59 percent group members in the age group of 25-35 years were dynamic running their micro enterprises successfully. However, their major activities constituted traditional tailoring and dairy. Lalitha, N. and Nagrajan, B.S. (2002) explained that group cohesion depends on size of the group. Larger the size of group, lower the group cohesion and vice versa. They also found that loan size in case of the groups studied was too small to meet the requirement of group members. Dutta, P. (2011) observed that SHG-Bank Linkage Programme has been instrumental in Socio-economic empowerment of poor, especially of women. Rajendran & Raya (2011) found a significant relationship between educational levels of the respondents and their period of membership in groups, loans and empowerment of rural women in Vellore district. In order to solve the problem related to marketing of the products of the SHGs, Mahendra (2011) suggested that the government should try to organize small fairs at regular intervals. Mohanty (2009) recommended that special incentives should be given to the NGOs working in hilly and backward areas. Pati A.P. (2008) found that operating cost was high in case of the SHGs under SGSY scheme. The impact of subsidy on the sustainability of SHGs was found negative. Edvinraj (2007) reported that SHGs had a positive impact on living standards of poor people, that is, improved food intake, nutrition, children education and health status. Ansari S.A. (2008) pointed out that SHGs formed by NGOs and other formal agencies but directly financed by banks was the most successful model in India. As there were a few studies on awareness of group members about key activities of the self-help groups, the present study attempted to highlight on the aspect of awareness of group members.

Statement of the problem

The paper intended to probe into the questions: Was there any change in saving pattern of group members after joining the groups? Which were the influential factors for joining Self-help groups? Whether financial assistance by the groups was adequate? Was there any association between gender of the group member and awareness about group activities? To what extent, the group members were benefitted? Keeping in view, these questions, the study was conducted and completed.

Objectives of the study

The principal objectives of the study are as under:

- (1) To understand the awareness of group members about group activities
- (2) To study the influencing factors for joining self help groups
- (3) To understand the savings pattern of SHG members
- (4) To investigate the socio-economic impact of SHG activities on group members

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no association between gender and awareness about financial activities of the group

H₀₂: There is no association between gender and awareness about administrative activities of the group

H₀₃: There is no association between gender and awareness about social activities of the group

H₀₄: There is no association between gender and awareness about political activities of the group

Research Methodology

Scope and period of the study:

The study is empirical and analytical in nature. The study is confined to the self-help groups promoted by three NGOs viz., Yuva Gram (Beed district), SACRED (Jalna district) and Paryay (Osmanabad district). The study survey was conducted during 2013-14 with a questionnaire containing relevant questions.

Data sources:

The study is based on both the primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected through a well structured questionnaire and interactions with the sample group members. The secondary data were collected from the sources such as, research journals, NABARD reports and books. Data analysis tools applied were simple percentage, Weighted Averages and Chi-square test.

Universe and Sample size:

There were 6,92,274 savings linked SHGs in Maharashtra as on 31st March, 2014(NABARD Report, 2014). Considering the large universe and constraints, the researcher selected 219 group members from 73 Self- help groups promoted by three NGOs viz., Yuva Gram (Beed district), SACRED (Jalna district) and Paryay (Osmanabad district) for the purpose of the study. From each self help groups, three members were selected on Convenience sampling basis. Out of 219 group members, 102 (46.58) were male members whereas 117 (53.42%) were female members.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample group members

	NGO	No. of groups	Sample groups	Sample group members	Male members	Female members
Beed	Yuva Gram	75	15	45	21	24
Jalna	Sacred	200	40	120	56	64
Osmanabad	Paryay	90	18	54	25	29
Total		365	73	219	102	117

The responses were collected with the help of a well structured questionnaire. While collecting the responses, the researcher had discussions and interactions with the respondents, the office bearers of the groups whenever possible.

Results and Discussion

The socio-economic characteristics viz., gender, age, marital status, social category, education, occupation and income were studied to understand the socio-economic background of group members. As shown in table-2, of the aggregate 219 group members, 46.57 per cent were male members and 53.43 per cent female members. Age wise distribution of the respondents indicated that the highest number of the respondents, that is, 47.94 per cent were in the age group of 40-55 years; 36.93 per cent respondents in the age group of 25-40 years; 11.42 percent respondents were below 25 years age whereas 4.11 percent were above 55 years of age. Majority of the respondents were young and enthusiastic to take up socio-economic activities through self- help groups. It was also noticed that adult group members were cooperative and guided always to other members. As far as educational level of the respondents was concerned, 42.01 percent of the respondents had got education up to primary level; 39.27 percent of the respondents up to secondary level; 12.78 percent of the respondents obtained education up to higher secondary level and 5.94 percent of the respondents were graduates. Literacy level of the group members is one of the significant factors contributing to the success and sustainability of group activities. The data regarding marital status of the respondents indicated that 87.67 percent of 219 respondents were married; 4.11 percent respondents were unmarried; 4.57 percent respondents were divorcees and 3.65 percent respondents were widows. As regards social category of the group members, it was observed that general category respondents accounted 49.32 percent of 219 respondents; the respondents from OBC category were 26.94 percent whereas SC and ST category respondents constituted 11.42 percent and 5.02 percent of the total respondents respectively.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics Of Group Members

Characteristics	No. of respondents	Percentage
Gender		
Male	102	46.57
Female	117	53.43
Age (years)		
< 25	25	11.42
25-40	80	36.53
40-55	105	47.94
> 55	09	4.11
Education		
Primary	92	42.01

Secondary	86	39.27
Higher secondary	28	12.78
Graduation	13	5.94
Marital Status		
Unmarried	09	4.11
Married	192	87.67
Widow	08	3.65
Divorcee	10	4.57
Social category		
General	108	49.32
OBC	59	26.94
SC	25	11.42
ST	11	5.02
Others	16	7.30
Occupation		
Agriculture labor	95	43.38
Small business	41	18.72
Service	11	5.02
Agriculture	72	32.88
Annual income		
< Rs. 25,000	93	42.47
Rs. 25,000-50,000	74	33.79
Rs. 50,000- 75,000	24	10.96
> Rs. 75,000	28	12.78

Source: Field Survey, 2014

The respondents from 'Others' category accounted 7.30 percent. It is to be noticed that the groups are formed irrespective of castes, creed and religion. Occupation and income are important economic variables. Of 219 respondents, 43.38 percent respondents were agriculture labour; 32.88 percent of the respondents were farmers; 18.72 percent were engaged in small business activities and 5.02 percent were in service. Annual income of the respondents ranged between Rs. 25,000-75,000. Of 219 respondents, 42.47 percent respondents had annual income less than Rs. 25,000; 33.79 percent of the respondents earned annual income between Rs. 25,000-40,000; 10.96 percent of the respondents earned annually in the range of Rs.50,000-75,000 whereas 12.78 percent of the respondents had annual income more than Rs.75,000. The data analysis disclosed that majority of the group members were in lower income group(table-2).

Assets owned by the respondents:

Land

A piece of land is the source of income for small farmers. The land holding by the respondents under the study indicated that 65.75 percent of 219 respondents were land owners and 34.25 percent respondents were landless. All these respondents were marginal farmers and their land holding ranged between 2-5 acres (table-3).

Table 3. Assets of group members

Assets owned	No. of respondents	Percentage
Land holding		
2 acres	37	16.89
3 acres	41	18.72
4 acres	32	14.61
5 acres	34	15.53
Landless	75	34.25
Supporting assets		

Cow/ buffalo	110	50.23
Poultry birds	21	9.59
Goats	19	8.68
Renting agriculture equipments	06	2.74
No assets	63	28.77
House		
Owned	199	90.87
Indira Aawas	20	9.13
Kaccha	69	31.51
Pakka	150	68.49

Source: Field survey, 2014

As regards the supportive assets (income generating assets) owned by the respondents, it was found that 71.23 percent of the respondents had some assets whereas 28.77 percent of the respondents had no such assets. Of 219 respondents, 50.23 percent respondents owned milch animals like buffalo and cows; 9.59 percent respondents had poultry birds; 8.68 percent respondents had goats and 2.74 percent respondents were found offering their agricultural equipments on hiring basis. Of 219 respondents, 90.87 percent respondents had own houses and 9.13 percent respondents had obtained houses under 'Indira Awas Yojana.' Of 219 respondents, 68.49 percent respondents were Pakka house owners and 31.51 percent of the respondents had Kaccha houses.

Sources of funds

Data given in table 4 explains about the change in sources of funds of group members. All the group members had access to group funding. However, the number of the respondents availing bank finance was found increased by four times after joining the groups. It was noteworthy that the number of the respondents availing finance from credit co-operatives, money lenders, employers and traders had reduced by 61.36 percent; 84.52 percent; 19.23 percent and 56.25 percent respectively after joining the groups.

Table 4. Changes In Sources Of Funds Of Group Members (n-219)

Sources of Funds before joining groups	No. of respondents	Sources funds after joining groups	No. of respondents	Percentage change
SHG	00	SHG	219	100
Banks	31	Banks	155	500
Credit cooperative society	44	Credit cooperative society	17	- (61.36)
Money lenders	84	Money lenders	13	- (84.52)
Relatives	16	Relatives	17	6.25
Employer	26	Employer	21	-(19.23)
Traders	18	Traders	07	- (56.25)

Source: Field survey, 2014

Saving pattern:

The data given in table 5 indicated that saving pattern of the respondents had shown incremental growth after they joined the group. Of 219 respondents, 57.99 percent respondents reported that they could save hardly Rs. 50 per month; 32.42 percent of the respondents had monthly saving of Rs. 100 whereas 9.59 percent of the respondents could save each Rs.150 per month before joining the groups. They also agreed that money saving was irregular activity and they used to save money for spending and there was no consideration for investment.

It was noticed that after joining the groups, every member had to deposit a fixed amount of saving with the concerned group. It was mandatory and in case of default, a fine was charged ranging between Rs. 10-15. The data disclosed that 34.25 percent of the respondents had been depositing Rs.100 per month;

54.79 percent and 10.96 percent of the respondents had been saving Rs.150 and Rs. 200 per month respectively. In comparison with the monthly saving amount by the respondents before joining the groups, certainly there was remarkable growth in monthly saving amount of the respondents after joining the groups. Incremental net growth in average monthly savings was found to be 82.52 percent. The respondents agreed that they learnt financial discipline and were encouraged to invest money in productive activities.

Table 5. Savings Pattern –Before And After Joining The Groups

District	Monthly Savings before joining SHGs/respondents				Monthly Savings after joining group/respondents			
	Rs.50	Rs-100	Rs.150	Total	Rs.100	Rs.150	Rs.200	Total
No. of respondents	127 (57.99)	71 (32.42)	21 (9.59)	219 (100.00)	75 (34.25)	120 (54.79)	24 (10.96)	219 (100.00)
Savings amount (Rs.)	6,350	7,100	3,150	16,600	7,500	18,000	4,800	30,300
Average savings (Rs.) per member p.m.				75.80				138.35
Incremental net growth in savings after joining SHGs								82.52%

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Motivating factors for group members

As shown in table 6, besides SHPIs, Mahila Arthik Vikas Manadal (MAVIM) had motivated 6 (2.74 percent) respondents; banks had encouraged 19 (8.68 percent) respondents; Mahila mandals were motivators for 59 (26.94 percent) respondents; friends and relatives had encouraged 51 (23.29 percent) respondents and 12 (5.48 percent) respondents respectively to join the SHGs.

Table 6. Motivating Factors For Group Members

Motivating factors	NGO	MAVIM	Bank	Mahila mandal	Friends	Relatives
No. of respondents	219	16	19	59	51	12
Percentage to total 219	100.00	7.31	8.77	26.94	23.29	5.48

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

Influencing factors

The data shown in table-7 indicated that all the respondents had joined SHGs to get the benefits of savings, loan and insurance. Besides these major influencing factors, 158 (72.15 percent) respondents had joined SHGs for starting own business activity; socio-economic status and self reliance with respect were significant influencing factors for 57.08 percent and 69.86 percent respondents. According to 72 (32.88 percent) respondents skill development and training were important factors for joining SHGs.

Table 7. Influencing Factors For Joining SHGs

Influencing factors	Saving/loan /insurance	Own business activity	Socio-economic status	Self reliance and respect	Skill development & training
No. of respondents	219	158	125	153	72
Percentage to total 219	100.00	72.15	57.08	69.86	32.88

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

Financial assistance extended by the groups

The economic activities of group members are micro entrepreneurial activities. The SHGs provide finance to the members. In case of present study, the financial assistance by groups to the members ranged between Rs.5000-20000. The data given in table 8 disclosed that 43.83 percent of the respondents obtained financial assistance between Rs.5,000-10,000, 37.90 percent respondents secured loan amount between Rs. 10,000-15,000 whereas 18.26 percent respondents received assistance between Rs.15,000-20,000.

Table 8. Financial Assistance By The SHGs To The Members

Loan assistance	Rs.5000-10000	Rs.10000-15000	Rs.15001 -20000	Total
No. of respondents	96	83	40	219
Percentage	43.84	37.90	18.26	100.00

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

As far as frequency of loan assistance by the groups was concerned, 54.34 percent of the respondents had availed loan for first time, 33.33 per cent were assisted twice and 12.33 percent of the respondents were assisted thrice.

Table 9. Frequency of Loan Assistance Availed by Group Members

No. of times the finance availed by respondents	Once	Twice	Thrice	Total
No. of respondents	119	73	27	219
Percentage	54.34	33.33	12.33	100.00

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

As regards to adequacy of financial assistance by the SHGs, 46.58 per cent of the respondents reported that financial assistance by the SHGs was adequate. However, 53.42 percent respondents reported about inadequacy of financial assistance which forced them to avail loan from other sources (table-8).

Table 10. Responses regarding adequacy of financial assistance by SHGs

Whether financial assistance is adequate?	Yes	No	Total
No. of respondents	102	117	219
Percentage	46.58	53.42	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2014

Use of loan amount

As regards to use of loan by the group members, it was found that all 219 respondents had used loan amount for economic activity for which loan was sanctioned. Besides, 32.42 percent of the respondents had used loan amount for medicine, 25.11 percent respondents had used loan amount for education purpose, 8.22 percent of the respondents had spent loan amount for food items and marriages, 3.65 percent respondents spent loan amount for celebrating festivals, 59.36 percent of the respondents- domestic needs, 9.59 percent of the respondents-religious purposes and 28.31 percent had used loan amount for meeting emergency needs (table-11)

Table 11. Purpose wise of use of loan by the respondents

Purpose of use of loan	Business Trade	Medicine	Education	Food	Marriage	Festi-Val	Domestic needs	Religious Purpose
No.of respondents	219	71	55	68	38	28	130	21
Percentage	100.00	32.42	25.11	31.5	17.35	12.79	59.36	9.58

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

Note :- The figures in brackets indicate percentage to total 219 respondents.

Interest rates

Out of 219 respondents, 100 (45.66 percent) respondents reported that the SHGs were charging 2 per cent interest rate per month on loan amount whereas 73 (33.33 percent) respondents had been paying interest on loan amount @ 2.5 per cent per month. 30 respondents agreed that they were paying interest on loan amount @ 3 per cent per month (table- 12).

Table 12. Interest charged by SHGs

Interest rates charged on SHG loan	2% pm	2.5% pm	3% pm	Total
No. of SHGs	39	24	10	73
Percentage	53.42	32.88	13.70	100.00

Source:- Field Survey, 2010-11

According to 52.97 percent of respondents, interest rates charged by the SHGs were moderate; more than 30 percent opined that interest rates were high whereas 16.89 respondents complained about excessive interest rates (table-13)

Table 13. Opinions about interest charged by SHGs

Opinions about interest rates	Moderate	High	Excessive	Total
No. of respondents	116	66	37	219
Percentage	52.97	30.14	16.89	100.00

Source : Field survey, 2014

Loan Repayment

The study disclosed that of 219 respondents, 11.87 percent respondents had repaid loan amount before due date and more than 76 percent respondents had repaid loan amount on due date. However, 11.87 percent of the respondents were found repaying loan amount after due date.

In nutshell, 88.13 per cent of the respondents were found prompt in repaying loan amounts to their respective SHGs (table-14).

Table 14. Loan Repayment

Loan repayment	Before due date	On due date	After due date	Total
No. of respondents	26	167	26	219
Percentage	11.87	76.26	11.87	100.00

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

Loan recovery method

The economic activities of SHGs depend mostly on how promptly loan is sanctioned, disbursed and recovered? The data given in table 15 indicated that 39.27 per cent of the respondents reported that loan recovery was willingly as per scheduled time whereas 47.03 percent respondents were persuaded to repay the loan amount.

In case of 10.05 percent respondents, loan recovery was done through peer pressure and 3.65 respondents complained that they had experienced forceful recovery of loan from them. It is a matter of concern that some MFIs are using muscle power for recovering loan from group members.

Table 15. Responses Regarding SHG Loan Recovery

Loan recovery	Willingly as per schedule	Persuasion	Peer pressure	Forceful recovery	Total
No. of respondents	86	103	22	8	219
Percentage	39.27	47.03	10.05	3.65	100.00

Source:- Field Survey, 2014

Meetings

Self-help groups are run on democratic principles. Attendance in meetings is compulsory. Each member has right to attend the meetings and discuss on various issues. The responses regarding periodicity, attendance, active participation, presiding over meetings and maintenance of meetings are given in table-16. The data analysis regarding periodicity of meetings of the groups indicated that of 219 group members, 70.32 percent members attended weekly meetings; 19.18 percent members attended fortnightly meetings; and 10.50 percent members attended monthly meetings. As regards attendance of respondents at meetings was concerned, 60.64 percent members registered 90 percent attendance; 31.51 percent members attendance at meetings was 70 percent; and 6.85 percent of the respondents had 50 percent attendance at meetings. It was noticeable that 47.03 percent of the respondents had shown 100 percent active participation in the discussion; 39.27 percent respondents had recorded 75 percent active participation in the discussion whereas 13.70 percent of the respondents reported 50 percent active participation.

Table 16. Responses Regarding Group Meetings

Meetings	Total	Percentage to total 219
Periodicity of the meetings		
Weekly	154	70.32
Fortnightly	42	19.18
Monthly	23	10.50
Attendance of the members		
50%	15	6.85
70%	69	31.51
90%	135	61.64
Participation in discussion		
50%	30	13.70
75%	86	39.27
100%	103	47.03
Presided over the meetings		
Once	47	21.47
Twice	37	16.89
Thrice	20	9.13
Never	115	52.51
Minutes of meetings prepared		
Regularly	169	77.17
Occasionally	31	14.15
Rarely	19	8.68

Source: Field survey, 2014

Every member has the opportunity to preside over the meetings. It was found that out of 219 respondents, 20 (9.13 percent) respondents had got the opportunity of presiding over the meetings for three time; 37 (16.89 percent) respondents had presided over the meetings for two times; and 47 (21.46 percent) had got the chance for one time. However, more than 52 percent of the respondents had never presided over the meetings. With regard to maintenance of the minutes, it was also observed that 77.17 percent of the respondents reported about regular maintenance of minutes of the meetings; according to 14.16 percent of the respondents it was occasional activity and 8.68 percent explained that maintenance of minutes of meetings was done rarely (table-16)

Awareness of group members about key group activities

The study attempted to understand as to what extent the group members (male/female) were aware about key activities of the groups. The activities on which responses of the group members were collected included financial activities, administrative activities, social activities, political activities and entrepreneurial activities as shown in table 15. In order to explain the association between the gender

(male/ female members) and key group activities such as, financial , administrative, social, political and entrepreneurial activities, the researcher formulated hypotheses and applied Chi-square test.

The formula is : $X^2 = \sum (O-E)^2 / E$

Table 17. Responses Regarding The Awareness Of The Members On Overall Group Activities

Group activities	Gender	Response level of the respondents			Total	Chi-square value	Table value @5% significance level
		Least aware	Moderately aware	Mostly aware			
1.* Financial activities	Male	10	37	55	102	12.079	5.991
	Female	11	19	87	117		
	Total	21	56	142	219		
2. *Administrative activities	Male	8	29	65	102	5.225	5.991
	Female	12	17	88	117		
	Total	20	46	153	219		
3. *Social activities	Male	9	31	62	102	4.780	5.991
	Female	14	21	82	117		
	Total	23	52	144	219		
4. *Political activities	Male	8	35	59	102	7.522	5.991
	Female	21	47	49	117		
	Total	29	82	108	219		
5. *Entrepreneurial activities	Male	21	41	40	102	2.921	5.991
	Female	34	46	37	117		
	Total	55	87	77	219		

Source: Field survey, 2014

Note: * 1). Financial activities: savings, loan, interest rate, revolving fund, insurance, bank transactions etc. 2). Administrative activities: Day to day working, meetings, decisions, minutes etc. 3). Social activities: Participating social campaigns and programmes, fighting against social ills etc.4). Political activities: Participation in political gatherings, contesting elections, campaigning for group members etc. 5). Entrepreneurial activities: setting up micro enterprise, managing the resources, marketing etc.

Interpretation and results

1)As shown in table 17, the calculated value of X^2 is 12.079, which is more than its critical value, that is 5.991(for 3 degrees of freedom) at 5% significance level, hence null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected. So, it is inferred that there is significant association between gender and awareness about financial activities of the group. 2) The calculated value of X^2 is 5.225, which is less than its critical value, that is, 5.991 (for 3 d.f.) at 5% significance level, hence null hypothesis (H_{02}) is accepted. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no association between gender and awareness about administrative activities of the group. 3) The calculated value of X^2 is 4.708 , which is less than its critical value, that is, 5.991 (for 3 d.f.) at 5% significance level, hence null hypothesis (H_{03}) is accepted. Hence, it is inferred that there is no association between the gender and awareness about social activities of the group. 4) The calculated value of X^2 is 7.522 , which is more than its critical value, that is, 5.991 ((for 3 d.f.)) at 5% significance level, hence null hypothesis (H_{04}) is rejected. Hence, it is inferred that there is significant association between the gender and awareness about political activities of the group. 5)The calculated value of X^2 is 2.921 , which is less than its critical value, that is, 5.991 ((for 3 d.f.)) at 5% significance level, hence null hypothesis (H_{05}) is accepted. Hence, it is inferred that there is no association between the gender and awareness about entrepreneurial activities of the group.

Benefits of SHGs

The responses of the respondents regarding benefits of Self-help groups are given in table 16. The researcher has used five point likert scale to understand the individual agreement or disagreement with regard to a particular statement indicating benefits. The values of scales are as: strongly agree (1); agree (0.5); neither agree nor disagree (0); disagree (-0.5) and strongly disagree (- 1)

The formula for computing weighted means: $\bar{x} = \frac{\sum f_i x_i}{\sum f_i}$

Where, \bar{x} = weighted Mean

$x_i = x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots$ = All items given

and f_1, f_2, f_3, \dots = frequency corresponding to the given item

The data given in table 18 highlighted on the responses (strong agreement plus agreement) regarding the benefits obtained by the group members. Of 219 respondents, 70.31 percent respondents agreed about increase in income; 77 percent respondents reported about increase in access to credit; 59.82 percent respondents reported about reduced dependency on private money lenders. More than 73 percent respondents had started economic activities; 68.49 percent had got self employment; 74.43 percent respondents had active participation in social activities; 67.58 percent respondents participated in political activities; 81.28 percent of the respondents reported increased responsiveness to in social and economic changes; 80 percent of the respondents agreed that they were respected by others because of group members; 74.43 percent of the respondents became more co-operative and helpful; 68.04 percent of the respondents learnt business skills; 73.52 percent of the respondents agreed about increased decision making; 74.88 percent of the respondents became more communicative; 72.60 percent of the respondents agreed about their increased standard of living; 69.41 percent of the respondents reported about improvement in health and 71.15 percent of the respondents opined that their confidence level had increased because of group activities. The data given in table 18 also indicated that the responses of the members regarding benefits of SHGs, namely, responsiveness to socio-economic changes; standard of living; exposure and communication; decision making; being respected by others; participation in social activities; more and easy access to credit; self-confidence and savings had the respective weighted averages above the weighted average of overall benefits (0.45).

Table 18. Responses of the respondents regarding the benefits of SHGs

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	W.M (weighted mean)
1. Income has increased	111 (50.68)	43 (19.63)	15 (6.85)	22 (10.05)	28 (12.79)	0.43
2. Savings have increased	107 (48.86)	54 (24.66)	13 (5.94)	20 (9.13)	25 (11.41)	0.45
3. Access to credit has enhanced	103 (47.03)	65 (29.68)	18 (8.22)	15 (6.85)	18 (8.22)	0.51
4. Dependency on money lenders reduced	84 (38.36)	47 (21.46)	10 (4.57)	46 (21.00)	32 (14.61)	0.24
5. Economic activities started	104 (47.49)	57 (26.03)	10 (4.57)	26 (11.87)	22 (10.04)	0.44
6. Employment has become certain	99 (45.20)	51 (23.29)	13 (5.94)	23 (10.50)	33 (15.07)	0.36
7. Participation in social activities has increased	97 (44.29)	66 (30.14)	12 (5.48)	30 (13.70)	14 (6.39)	0.46
8. Active participation in political activities	116 (52.97)	32 (14.61)	20 (9.13)	30 (13.70)	21 (9.59)	0.44
9. Became responsive to socio- economic changes	123 (56.16)	55 (25.11)	06 (2.74)	16 (7.31)	19 (8.68)	0.56
10. Respected by others	116 (52.97)	59 (26.94)	07 (3.20)	21 (9.59)	16 (7.31)	0.54
11. Became more co-operative and helpful	89 (40.64)	74 (33.79)	16 (7.30)	22 (10.05)	18 (8.22)	0.44

12. Learnt business skills	104 (47.49)	45 (20.55)	11 (5.02)	37 (16.89)	22 (10.05)	0.39
13. Became more decisive	120 (54.79)	41 (18.72)	16 (7.31)	24 (10.96)	18 (8.22)	0.50
14. Got more exposure and opportunities of communication	107 (48.86)	57 (26.03)	15 (6.85)	27 (12.33)	13 (5.94)	0.50
15. Standard of living increased	100 (45.66)	59 (26.94)	18 (8.22)	22 (10.05)	20 (9.13)	0.55
16. Improvement in health	94 (42.93)	58 (26.48)	13 (5.94)	28 (12.78)	26 (11.87)	0.38
17 Self confidence increased	113 (51.59)	45 (20.55)	16 (7.31)	24 (10.96)	21 (9.59)	0.47
Overall weighted average						0.45

Source: Field Survey, 2014

So, the performance of the groups in this regard was found to be remarkable. On the other hand, the responses regarding the benefits, namely, reduction in dependency on moneylenders; certainty of employment; improvement in health; income and starting economic activities had the respective weighted averages below the weighted average of overall benefits, indicating somewhat poor performance of the groups.

Conclusion

Self-help groups were found effective in savings mobilization, credit providing for economic and non-economic needs of the members. The study concluded that there was high increase in responsiveness of the members to socio-economic changes; standard of living; exposure and communication; decision making; being respected by others; participation in social activities; more and easy access to credit; self-confidence and savings. Group members had high level of participation in group meetings. Similarly, they were aware about group activities, namely, financial, administrative, social, political and entrepreneurial activities. However, the study inferred that there was significant association between the gender and awareness about financial and political activities of the group whereas the gender of group members and awareness about administrative activities, social and entrepreneurial activities were found independent of each other.

Research implications, Limitations of the study and scope for future research

The findings of the study have significant implications for NGOs, Micro Finance Institutions, policy makers and researchers. The study was confined to a small number of members of self-help groups promoted by three NGOs working Marathwada region. Some respondents were found hesitant for sharing information. The empirical findings of the study provide a base for further studies on sustainable development of self-help groups for betterment of the poor, gender equality, and promotion of non-farm activities through groups in order to accelerate the pace of rural development.

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