

Study on men's perception on gender issues, self-help groups and empowerment of women

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ABSTRACT

Many institutions have organized marginalized women into Sanghas with a view to empower them. The empowerment approach initiated processes that resulted in the restoration of women's self image and confidence. The present investigation was undertaken with an objective to ascertain men's perceptions about various issues of women empowerment and self-help groups (SHG's). The study was conducted in Haveri district of Karnataka involving husbands of both SHG and non-SHG members. The results revealed that among the husbands of SHG members, 70% no longer borrowed loans from money lenders, all of them have saved money, only 11% migrated in search of employment, 89% purchased assets, 62% of them were well off, 93% of them started recognizing their wives roles in the family, only 16% were having bad habits and 80% have favourable opinion on women participating in SHG's. Whereas among the husbands of non-SHG members, 85% took loan from money lenders and not saved any money, 63% still migrated to seek employment, 61% lived in economically poor conditions, 59% were drunkards and majority denied their wives participation in SHG's. It is evident from the study that the process of empowerment of women resulted in significant changes in men's attitude towards women.

KEY WORDS : Empowerment of women, Self-help groups, Gender issues

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INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a state of being that reflects a certain level of critical consciousness about external realities and an awareness about their internal thought construction and belief systems that affect their well being in terms of gender justice and social justice; as well as the determination to use their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual resources to protect, nurture and sustain values that guarantee gender equity at personal, familial, social, political and institutional levels (Overholt and Catherine, 1985). Since last decade, NGO's, development departments, financial Institutions, Krishi Vigyan Kendras started operating in their respective areas by organizing marginalised women into Sanghas with a view to empower them socially, economically, politically and at the personal level. Over these years, the Sanghas have passed through various stages, faced many problems both from within and outside, grown with experience and

progressed tremendously. The process of identifying issues (problems) and initiating action towards resolving them has instilled in the members the confidence and courage to fight for their rights. The empowerment approach in essence initiated processes that result in the restoration of women's self image and their confidence. To provide them with space to come together as a group, give them access to credit and markets, build their confidence in handling finances, to own productive assets, to resist exploitation and bargain for gender equity. Women are motivated to take up issues relating to basic amenities for meeting their practical needs as well as entitlement rights and in the process acquire skills to analyse and reconstruct their realities and learn survival strategies to protect themselves as individuals and as women (Ahojja and Patel, 1993).

The process of women's empowerment will also liberate men. They will be free from the roles of oppressor

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and exploiter and become better human beings. Present investigation was undertaken with an objective to ascertain men's (Husbands of SHG and non-SHG members) perceptions about empowerment of women, gender issues, the Sangha and its activities and impact of the same on their well being.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in randomly selected 20 villages of Haveri district of Karnataka State. A total of 800 men, comprising of 500 husbands of SHG members as experiment group and 300 husbands of non-SHG members as control group constituted the sample. Data were collected by adopting sample survey and comparative study method using comprehensive interview schedule (Hebbare, 1997). Information collected was on the socio-economic background of the respondents, their achievements in terms of loan, thrift habits, migration, purchase of assets, economic status, social participation, health status and their perceptions on gender issues, SHGs and empowerment of women. The data collected were

analysed using simple statistical tests like frequency and percentages.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

For understanding the socio-economic and psychological impact of the thrift and credit scheme on the husbands of the SHG members, a survey was conducted for experiment group whose wives have completed more than a year as a Sangha member as well as for control group members whose wives were not the members of Sangha. The findings of the survey were as follows:

The results on the socio-economic background of the members are presented in Table 1, which reveals that majority (37.8%) of the respondents of both experiment group and control group (58.33%) were in the age group ranging from 22–35 years (Table 1). Of 500 members of experiment group, 46 per cent were neo-literates, whereas in control group about 83 per cent were illiterates. Of the remaining, about 6 per cent of them were only functionally literate. Working as a coolie on daily wage basis was the

Table 1 : Socio-economic background of the respondents

Sr. No.	Attributes	Experiment group (n=500)		Control group (n=300)	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Age (years)				
	22-35 - Young	189	37.8	175	58.33
	36-45 - Middle	185	37.0	64	21.33
	46 and above – Old	126	25.2	61	20.33
2.	Caste				
	SC/ST	93	18.6	157	52.33
	OBC	175	35.0	92	30.66
	Others	232	46.4	51	17.00
3.	Education				
	Illiterates	85	17.0	249	83.0
	Neo-literates	230	46.0	15	05.0
	Primary	110	22.0	18	06.0
	Higher primary	35	07.0	09	03.0
	Secondary	30	06.0	03	01.0
	Pre-University	05	01.0	03	01.0
	Degree	05	01.0	03	01.0
4.	Occupation				
	Agriculture	182	36.4	53	17.50
	Working in factories / mills	19	03.8	07	02.4
	Coolie	201	40.2	201	67.1
	Others	98	19.6	39	13.0
5.	Annual income				
	≤ 5000	146	29.2	111	37.00
	5001 – 10000	161	32.2	67	22.33
	10001 – 20000	93	18.6	66	22.00
	20000 and above	100	20.0	56	18.66

major occupation of both the groups followed by agriculture. The percentage of households living below the poverty line was about 80 and 82 per cent for experiment and control group, respectively.

The results regarding different achievements of groups are presented in Table 2. The thrift scheme of their wives helped the husbands of SHG members to escape from the exploitation by money lenders and land lords who charged 60 to 200 per cent interest. About 70 per cent of the 500 husbands of SHG members, no longer borrowed loans from money lenders. Of the remaining 30 per cent, 25.5 per cent indicated that taking loans from money lenders has reduced. Only 4.5 per cent of them are still taking loans from money lenders. The loans taken by the members of experiment group through their wives thrift scheme ranged from a minimum of Rs. 100 to a maximum of Rs.20,000. These loans were utilized for both consumption as well as productive purposes. On the other hand, 85 per cent of men of control group took loan from money lenders. These loans ranged from Rs.300 to 35,000.

The control group respondents took loans mainly for consumption purposes.

Only 13 per cent of the husbands of non-sangha members have saved for emergency purposes. Majority of the control group respondents (85%) have not saved any money, where as all the respondents of experiment group saved money in self-help groups through their wives regular savings.

Only 11 per cent of the respondents of the experiment group migrated in search of employment. Only 3 per cent habituated to seasonal migration to work in Tea/Coffee estates. On the other hand, majority of the respondents from the control group (63%) still migrate to seek employment.

Only 2 per cent of the control group members purchased any assets. On the other hand 89 per cent of the husbands of SHG members purchased both, movable and immovable assets. Of these, about 36 per cent have purchased immovable assets like land, houses etc. The others (53%) have purchased movable assets like cows,

Table 2 : Achievements of experiment group compared with control group

Sr. No.	Achievements	Experiment group (n=500)		Control group (n=300)	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Outside loan				
	Money lenders, friends, relatives	150	30	255	85
	SHGs	285	57	--	--
	Financial institutions	65	13	45	15
2.	Thrift habits				
	Regular savings	500	100	6	2
	Savings for emergency	--	--	--	--
	No savings	--	--	255	85
3.	Migration				
	Habituated to seasonal migration	15	03	21	07
	Migrate to seek employment	55	11	189	63
	No migration	430	86	90	30
4.	Purchase of assets				
	Movable	265	53	03	01
	Immovable	180	36	03	01
	No purchases	55	11	294	98
5.	Economic status				
	Improved	310	62	21	7
	Slightly improved	175	35	96	32
	Not improved	15	03	183	61
6.	Social participation				
	Increased	330	66	45	15
	Low participation	155	31	75	25
	No participation	15	03	180	60
7.	Health status				
	Good	325	65	30	16
	Presence of disorders	95	19	93	31
	Prevalence of bad habits	80	16	177	59

buffaloes, sheeps, goats, poultry and bicycles. Initially the members took loans to meet the basic consumption needs. They now borrow for both consumption and productive purposes from their wives thrift scheme. Of the total 500 members 285 (57%) took loan for both consumption and productive purposes and 215 (43%) for consumption purposes.

The standard of living of husbands of Sangha members has improved as a result of the thrift scheme. About 62 per cent of the members were already well off. The economic condition of another 35 per cent of the experiment group respondents also improved, and their children are now in good health and clothing and undergoing good education.

The income level of the family rose by Rs.500 to 5000. As a result, their overall economic position showed an upward swing. With the increase in incomes, their consumption level also underwent a radical change. They were now able to provide better food for themselves and for their children. Their pattern of consumption also improved. They now focused more on nutritious food such as milk, meat and vegetables.

The trend is opposite for husbands of non-sangha members. About 61 per cent of them lived in economically poor conditions (Table 2).

All round development is absent in the case of husbands of non-sangha members. The level of their wives participation at the community level was very poor. Their awareness of economic activities was found to be very less.

Majority of the experiment group members (93%) started recognizing their wives roles in the family and also started consulting them in the decision making process. They opined that all the family members have gained social status and acquired respectability due to their improved

economic strength. Some of them were also consulted for resolving conflicts in the village by the fellow farmers.

In control group about 31 per cent of the respondents were suffering from various health disorders and 59 per cent were chronic drunkards. Majority of the experiment group members were in good health conditions. Prevalence of bad habits was found to be very less in experiment group (16%) when compared to control group (59%).

Men's perceptions on gender issues, self-help groups and empowerment of women are presented in Table 3. About 80 per cent of the respondents of the experiment group were of favourable opinion on women participating in SHGs in Panchayaths, taking part in social and political issues, contacting government officers/ leaders and participating in public meetings. They also encouraged women's empowerment and appreciated statutory reservation of one third of seats for women. Majority of the control group respondents denied their wives participating in SHGs and other related issues.

About 95 per cent of the experiment group appreciated women's rights to food, sharing of work, decision making, buying things and equal property rights, as against 21 per cent in control group. Majority (> 83%) of the respondents of experiment group were against dowry harassment, female infanticide and domestic violence on women whereas control group members were not clear in their ideas (Table 3).

Conclusion:

By comparing the husbands of SHG members with the control group *i.e.*, husbands of non-SHG members, it was evident from the study that the process of empowerment of women resulted in significant changes in men's attitudes towards women. Women were recognised as owners of different trades like sheep/goat

Table 3: Men's perception on gender issues, self-help groups and empowerment of women

Sr. No.	Men's perception	Experiment group (n=500)			Control group (n=300)		
		A	UD	DA	A	UD	DA
1.	Participation of women in social issues	80	07	13	02	21	77
2.	Women contacting Government officials and leaders	80	07	12	10	01	89
3.	Participation of women in Panchayat	80	13	07	09	10	81
4.	Participation in public meetings	80	09	11	02	--	98
5.	Women's rights	95	4.2	2.8	21	8.6	70.4
6.	Participation of women in Sangha activities	80	20	--	17	--	83
7.	Statutory reservation of seats for women	80	08	12	16	63	21
8.	Overall empowerment of women	82	10	08	11	07	82
9.	Female Infanticide	02	15	83	79	21	--
10.	Dowry harassment	--	11	89	81	05	14
11.	Domestic violence on women	07	13	80	72	25	03

A= Agree, DA = Disagree, UD = Undecided, Figures are in percentages

rearing, dairy farming and poultry by the men folk. They were also of the opinion that women can now supplement the family's income. Their huts are now tiled only because of their wife's involvement in SHGs. They have realized the importance of eating nutritious food. There is a marked increase in the children's school attendance, especially of the girls, after their women became economically independent. Domestic violence in the family has reduced after the women stopped the sale of liquor in the village. Thus, the process of empowerment of women also liberated men. They were relieved from the roles of oppressor and exploiter and became better especially gender sensitive human beings.

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