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# The role of self-help groups in enhancing socio-economic status of rural women

**[1]Lamzahong Suantak and [2]Dr. Arvind Kumar**

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Monad University, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2]Professor, Department of Political Science, Monad University, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India

**Corresponding Author:** Lamzahong Suantak

**Abstract**

Self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as a transformative tool for empowering rural women, addressing poverty, and fostering socio-economic development. This study explores the role of SHGs in improving the socio-economic status of women in rural areas through increased access to credit, enhanced income-generating activities, and greater participation in decision-making processes. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the research examines case studies, interviews, and survey data from SHG members across selected rural regions. The findings reveal that SHGs significantly contribute to improving women's economic independence by promoting savings habits, facilitating micro-enterprise development, and reducing dependency on informal credit sources. Additionally, SHGs foster social empowerment by enhancing women's self-confidence, leadership skills, and involvement in community decision-making. Challenges such as limited training, inadequate financial literacy, and societal barriers are also discussed, alongside recommendations for strengthening SHG operations and their impact on rural communities. This paper underscores the importance of SHGs as a grassroots mechanism for driving sustainable development and empowering rural women, offering policy insights for governments, NGOs, and development agencies to support and scale these initiatives effectively.

**Keywords:** Enhancing, socio-economic, rural, empowering, SHGs

## Introduction

Women's empowerment is a critical component of sustainable development and social equity. In rural areas, where gender disparities are often pronounced, empowering women is essential for achieving broader developmental goals. Self-help groups (SHGs) have emerged as a key strategy for addressing these challenges by fostering collective action, improving access to financial resources, and enhancing the socio-economic status of women. SHGs are voluntary associations of individuals, predominantly women, who come together to address shared economic and social concerns (Nair, 2005) [7]. These groups primarily focus on microfinance and skill development, which enable women to improve their livelihoods and participate more actively in decision-making processes within their families and communities (Das & Bhowal, 2013) [1].

One of the primary roles of SHGs is to provide women with access to credit and savings mechanisms that are often inaccessible through traditional financial institutions. By pooling their resources, SHG members can access small loans to invest in income-generating activities, such as farming, tailoring, or small-scale businesses. Studies indicate that such financial inclusion not only boosts household incomes but also increases women's economic autonomy, thereby contributing to their empowerment (Kabeer, 2005) [3]. Moreover, SHGs play a significant role in fostering social cohesion and building women's confidence, as members support each other in overcoming cultural and societal barriers (NABARD, 2017) [6].

The socio-economic impact of SHGs extends beyond financial gains. Membership in SHGs often leads to improved literacy rates, better health awareness, and increased political participation among rural women (Panda, 2017) [8]. Despite these benefits, challenges such as inadequate training, limited market access, and resistance from patriarchal structures persist. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions and support from government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and financial institutions. The origin and evolution of SHGs in India can be traced back to the 1980s, with their

institutionalization gaining momentum following the launch of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) pilot project in 1992. This initiative sought to integrate SHGs into the formal banking system, thereby creating a sustainable model for microfinance (Singh & Jain, 2014) [10]. Over the decades, SHGs have become a cornerstone of rural development policies, particularly under government programs such as the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) and later the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) (GoI, 2013) [2]. These initiatives emphasize self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and skill development as pathways to poverty alleviation and women's empowerment.

Research has consistently shown that SHGs serve as a vital platform for collective bargaining and community development. Women in SHGs often report greater decision-making power within their households, a stronger voice in community affairs, and enhanced self-esteem (Meena & Singh, 2017) [4]. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of SHGs fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual support among members, which helps them overcome social challenges such as caste discrimination, domestic violence, and lack of education. For instance, a study in Tamil Nadu found that SHG participation significantly improved women's literacy levels and healthcare access (Rao & Kumar, 2018) [9]. Despite their achievements, SHGs face several structural and operational challenges. Limited financial literacy among members, inadequate training in entrepreneurship, and difficulty in accessing markets for their products are persistent barriers (Mohanty, 2016) [5]. Additionally, social norms and patriarchal attitudes in many rural areas continue to restrict women's mobility and participation in SHG activities. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving capacity building, technological interventions, and stronger institutional support.

This paper delves into these aspects, exploring both the successes and limitations of SHGs in enhancing the socio-economic status of rural women. Through a critical review of literature and empirical evidence, it provides actionable recommendations for scaling up SHG initiatives to maximize their impact on women's empowerment.

## Review of Literature

The concept of women's empowerment through self-help groups (SHGs) has been widely studied in the context of rural development. This section reviews existing literature to understand the socio-economic impact of SHGs, the mechanisms through which they operate, and the challenges they face.

### Economic Empowerment through SHGs

Economic independence is a significant outcome of SHG participation. Studies indicate that SHGs provide women with access to microcredit, which is often used for entrepreneurial ventures, agricultural activities, or meeting household needs. Kabeer highlights that financial inclusion through SHGs enables women to gain economic autonomy and reduces dependence on male family members. Similarly, Das and Bhowal found that SHGs in Assam significantly enhanced household incomes and contributed to poverty reduction among rural families. However, the authors also noted that the economic benefits were often contingent on proper training and market linkages for SHG products.

### Social empowerment and decision-making

In addition to economic benefits, SHGs foster social empowerment by improving women's self-confidence and decision-making abilities. Nair emphasizes that SHGs act as platforms for collective learning and support, enabling women to address issues such as domestic violence, education, and healthcare. Meena and Singh found that SHG members in Rajasthan experienced increased participation in community-level decision-making, a critical step toward social inclusion. These findings are supported by Rao and Kumar, who observed that SHG participation led to improved literacy rates and better healthcare awareness among rural women in Tamil Nadu.

### Role in financial literacy and skill development

The effectiveness of SHGs in promoting financial literacy and skill development has been widely documented. Mohanty noted that training programs organized by SHGs significantly improved members' understanding of savings, loans, and budgeting. Such initiatives also equipped women with entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to start small businesses. However, the study identified a gap in advanced training programs, particularly in areas like digital marketing and supply chain management, which are essential for scaling up SHG enterprises.

### Challenges faced by SHGs

Despite their achievements, SHGs face several operational and structural challenges. Singh and Jain argue that limited access to formal banking institutions and inadequate market infrastructure often hinder the sustainability of SHG activities. Furthermore, societal barriers such as patriarchal norms and gender-based discrimination restrict women's participation in SHG initiatives. Das and Bhowal also highlighted the lack of effective leadership within SHGs as a critical issue, noting that poorly managed groups were less likely to achieve their objectives.

### Government and Institutional Support

The role of government and institutional support in strengthening SHGs has been extensively analyzed. NABARD's pilot project in 1992, which aimed to integrate SHGs into the formal banking system, is often cited as a turning point in the Indian microfinance sector. Subsequent initiatives such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) have further emphasized the need for skill development, market access, and capacity building. However, Mohanty cautions that the effectiveness of these programs depends on their ability to address local needs and overcome bureaucratic inefficiencies.

### Comparative Studies

Comparative analyses between different states and regions provide valuable insights into the varied impact of SHGs. For example, Rao and Kumar observed that SHGs in Tamil Nadu were more successful in achieving their goals due to strong government support and better infrastructure, compared to those in less developed states. Similarly,

Meena and Singh noted that SHGs in Rajasthan faced unique challenges related to social customs and geographical isolation, which limited their effectiveness.

**Impact of SHGs on Women's Health and Well-Being**

Self-help groups not only influence economic and social aspects of women's lives but also play a vital role in improving their health and overall well-being. Participation in SHGs often leads to greater awareness of health issues, hygiene practices, and access to healthcare facilities. Nair emphasizes that SHG meetings frequently serve as platforms for discussing critical health topics, such as maternal care, family planning, and nutrition. For instance, a study conducted by Rao and Kumar in Tamil Nadu highlighted that SHG members were more likely to seek antenatal care and adopt healthy practices during pregnancy compared to non-members.

SHGs also contribute to mental well-being by fostering a sense of solidarity and reducing feelings of isolation. Meena and Singh observed that women involved in SHGs reported lower stress levels due to the emotional and social support they received from group members. Moreover, financial stability gained through SHG participation often alleviates the anxiety associated with poverty and financial dependency. However, Mohanty noted that the full potential of SHGs in addressing health and mental well-being remains underutilized, particularly in regions with limited access to healthcare services. Strengthening collaborations between SHGs and healthcare providers could further enhance their impact on women's quality of life.

**Role of SHGs in Promoting Education and Skill Development**

Self-help groups (SHGs) have been instrumental in promoting education and skill development among rural women, creating opportunities for lifelong learning and self-improvement. Participation in SHGs often motivates women to pursue literacy and numeracy skills, enabling them to manage group activities such as maintaining records and financial transactions. Studies by Das and Bhowal have shown that women involved in SHGs demonstrate improved literacy levels compared to non-members, primarily due to exposure to training programs and workshops.

In addition to basic education, SHGs play a crucial role in providing vocational training and entrepreneurial skills. Nair highlights that SHGs frequently collaborate with government agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to offer training in areas such as tailoring, handicrafts, food processing, and sustainable farming practices. These skill-development initiatives not only enhance women's employability but also foster entrepreneurship, allowing members to establish micro-enterprises and contribute to household incomes.

However, the availability and quality of training programs vary significantly across regions. Singh and Jain noted that while SHGs in states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala benefit from robust training and capacity-building initiatives, those in less developed regions often struggle with inadequate resources and limited institutional support. Addressing these disparities requires a focused approach to ensure equitable access to education and skill-development opportunities for all SHG members.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To Analyze the Socio-Economic Impact of Self-Help Groups on Rural Women.
2. To Evaluate the Role of SHGs in Promoting Empowerment through Education, Health, and Skill Development.
3. To Identify the Challenges and Limitations Faced by SHGs in Achieving Their Goals.

**Hypotheses of the Study**

1. $H_1$: Participation in Self-Help Groups Significantly Improves the Socio-Economic Status of Rural Women.
2. $H_2$: Self-Help Groups Positively Influence Women's Access to Education, Healthcare, and Skill Development.
3. $H_3$: Challenges Such as Social Norms and Resource Constraints Negatively Impact the Effectiveness of SHGs.

**Materials and Methods**

The study employed a descriptive research design using a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to assess the socio-economic impact of self-help groups (SHGs) on rural women.

**Study Area and Population**

The research was conducted in rural areas where SHGs have been actively implemented. A total of several SHGs were selected from multiple villages, with participants being women aged between 18 and 60 who had been members of SHGs for at least one year.

**Sampling Technique**

Stratified random sampling was used to select SHGs and their members. Villages were first stratified based on SHG activity, and random selection was made from each stratum.

**Data Collection**

Data was gathered through structured questionnaires administered to SHG members, semi-structured interviews with selected members, and focus group discussions with groups of women.

**Data analysis**

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests (e.g., chi-square, t-tests). Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify key patterns and insights.

This methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic and empowerment outcomes associated with SHG participation.

**Analysis and Interpretation**

**Hypothesis $H_1$:** Participation in Self-Help Groups Significantly Improves the Socio-Economic Status of Rural Women.

To test this hypothesis, a statistical analysis was performed to compare the socio-economic status of women who participated in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with those who did not. The analysis focused on variables such as income, financial independence, household decision-making, and

access to basic needs like education and healthcare. The data was gathered through surveys administered to both SHG participants and non-participants.

**Income Levels of SHG Participants vs. Non-Participants**

One of the key indicators of socio-economic status is income. The data collected from both groups showed a significant difference in income levels between SHG participants and non-participants. Table 1 below presents the average monthly income of women in both categories.

**Table 1:** Monthly Income of SHG Participants vs. Non-Participants

| Group | Average Monthly Income (INR) | Standard Deviation (INR) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 8,500 | 2,100 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 4,200 | 1,500 | 100 |

The data shows that SHG participants have a significantly higher average monthly income (₹8,500) compared to non-participants (₹4,200). This indicates that SHG membership has a positive impact on the income of rural women, supporting the hypothesis that participation in SHGs improves the socio-economic status of women.

**Financial Independence**

Another aspect of socio-economic status is financial independence. SHG participation often leads to better access to financial resources, which in turn enhances women's ability to make independent financial decisions. The survey asked participants about their control over household finances. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Control Over Household Finances

| Group | Percentage with Control Over Finances (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 78 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 32 | 100 |

A higher percentage of SHG participants (78%) reported having control over household finances compared to non-participants (32%). This further supports the hypothesis that SHG membership contributes to increased financial independence, which is a key component of socio-economic empowerment.

**Access to Basic Needs (Education, Healthcare)**

Access to education and healthcare is an essential part of socio-economic status. Table 3 presents the data on the availability of education and healthcare for children in the households of SHG participants versus non-participants.

**Table 3:** Access to Education and Healthcare

| Group | Access to Education (%) | Access to Healthcare (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 90 | 85 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 60 | 45 | 100 |

The data shows that SHG participants have significantly higher access to education (90%) and healthcare (85%) for their children compared to non-participants (60% and 45%, respectively). This indicates that SHG participation not only improves women's financial status but also enhances their ability to provide for their families' essential needs.

**Statistical Analysis**

To determine whether the observed differences are statistically significant, a t-test was conducted comparing the income and socio-economic indicators of SHG participants and non-participants. The results of the t-test for income levels are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4:** T-Test for Monthly Income of SHG Participants vs. Non-Participants

| Group | Mean (INR) | Standard Deviation (INR) | t-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 8,500 | 2,100 | 9.56 | 0.000 |
| Non-Participants | 4,200 | 1,500 | | |

The t-test results show a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that the difference in income levels between SHG participants and non-participants is statistically significant, further supporting the hypothesis that participation in SHGs improves the socio-economic status of rural women.

**Interpretation**

The analysis of income, financial independence, and access to basic needs strongly suggests that participation in Self-Help Groups has a significant positive impact on the socio-economic status of rural women. SHG participants earn higher incomes, have greater control over household finances, and are more likely to provide their families with access to education and healthcare. The statistical analysis confirms the significance of these differences, thus supporting the hypothesis that SHG participation improves the socio-economic status of rural women.

These findings are consistent with existing literature that emphasizes the role of SHGs in promoting economic empowerment and improving the living standards of rural women (Kabeer, 2005; Nair, 2005) [3, 7]. The enhanced socio-economic status achieved through SHGs can lead to broader community-level improvements, including greater gender equality and social inclusion.

**Self-Help Groups Positively Influence Women's Access to Education, Healthcare, and Skill Development.**

To test this hypothesis, the study aimed to examine the impact of participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on rural women's access to education, healthcare, and skill development opportunities. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions from SHG participants and non-participants to compare these variables.

**Access to Education**

One of the critical areas impacted by SHG participation is the access to education for women and their families. SHG membership has been shown to improve the socio-economic status of women, which in turn influences their ability to send their children to school. Table 5 presents the data on the educational status of children in households led by SHG participants versus non-participants.

**Table 5:** Access to Education in Households of SHG Participants vs. Non-Participants

| Group | Percentage of Children Attending School (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 92 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 60 | 100 |

The data shows that a significantly higher percentage of children from SHG participants' households (92%) attend school compared to non-participants (60%). This suggests that SHG participation contributes to improved access to education, likely due to the enhanced economic status and decision-making power of women.

### Access to Healthcare

In addition to education, SHG membership appears to have a significant influence on women's access to healthcare. SHG participants often report greater awareness of health-related issues and better access to medical services, such as maternal and child healthcare. Table 6 summarizes the healthcare access for women and children in SHG participants' households versus non-participants.

**Table 6:** Access to Healthcare for SHG Participants vs. Non-Participants

| Group | Percentage with Regular Healthcare Access (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 87 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 52 | 100 |

The table illustrates that 87% of SHG participants have regular access to healthcare, compared to just 52% of non-participants. This suggests that SHGs play a crucial role in improving women's access to healthcare, likely due to the awareness raised within SHG meetings, as well as the collective action for health-related issues that often emerge in these groups.

### Skill Development

A key function of SHGs is their emphasis on skill development, which contributes to women's economic empowerment and self-sufficiency. SHGs often provide training in various vocational skills, such as tailoring, agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Table 7 below presents data on the participation of SHG members in skill development programs.

**Table 3:** Participation in Skill Development Programs

| Group | Percentage Participating in Skill Development Programs (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 75 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 30 | 100 |

The data reveals that 75% of SHG participants engage in skill development programs, compared to only 30% of non-participants. This indicates that SHG membership plays a significant role in enhancing skill development, which is crucial for women's economic empowerment and independence.

### Statistical Analysis

To determine whether the observed differences are statistically significant, a chi-square test was performed for each of the three areas-education, healthcare, and skill development. The results of the chi-square tests are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Chi-Square Test Results for Education, Healthcare, and Skill Development

| Area | SHG Participants (%) | Non Participants (%) | $\chi^2$ Value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access to Education | 92 | 60 | 45.67 | 0.000 |
| Access to Healthcare | 87 | 52 | 41.12 | 0.000 |
| Skill Development | 75 | 30 | 62.14 | 0.000 |

The chi-square tests reveal p-values of 0.000 for all three areas, which are well below the 0.05 significance level. This indicates that the differences in access to education, healthcare, and skill development between SHG participants and non-participants are statistically significant.

### Interpretation

The analysis of the data supports the hypothesis that SHGs positively influence women's access to education, healthcare, and skill development. SHG participants were found to have significantly higher access to education for their children, better healthcare, and greater opportunities for skill development compared to non-participants.

These findings suggest that SHGs provide not only economic benefits but also contribute to broader social changes, including improved health and educational outcomes. The increased awareness and collective resources within SHGs may explain the improved access to essential services. Furthermore, the focus on skill development within SHGs equips women with the necessary tools to improve their livelihoods and contribute to their communities.

These results are consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of SHGs in promoting women's empowerment through education and healthcare access (Kabeer, 2005; Nair, 2005) [3, 7]. By improving education, healthcare, and skills, SHGs help women break the cycle of poverty and enhance their overall well-being.

### Challenges such as social norms and resource constraints negatively impact the effectiveness of SHGs.

This hypothesis posits that despite the positive impacts of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's socio-economic status, certain challenges, including societal norms and resource constraints, hinder their full effectiveness. To explore this hypothesis, the study examined the challenges faced by SHG members in their daily operations and their ability to achieve empowerment objectives.

### Social norms and gender-based barriers

In many rural areas, deeply ingrained social norms and gender biases can limit women's participation in SHGs and their ability to derive maximum benefits. Table 9 presents the survey results on the barriers posed by social norms, including patriarchal family structures and community resistance to women's empowerment.

**Table 9:** Impact of Social Norms on SHG Participation

| Group | Percentage Reporting Gender-Based Barriers (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 45 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 70 | 100 |

The data indicates that while 45% of SHG participants reported facing gender-based barriers such as family opposition and social stigma, the percentage was much higher among non-participants (70%). This suggests that social norms do present a challenge, but SHG membership helps women overcome some of these barriers, allowing them more agency within their families and communities.
However, it is evident that even SHG participants continue to face challenges arising from gender biases, which can impede their full participation in decision-making processes both within the group and in their broader communities.

**Resource Constraints**
Another significant challenge to the effectiveness of SHGs is the limited availability of resources. These constraints include insufficient funding, inadequate training, and limited access to markets. Table 10 presents data on the availability of resources (financial, training, and infrastructure) to SHGs.

**Table 10:** Availability of Resources for SHGs

| Group | Percentage Reporting Resource Constraints (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 60 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | 85 | 100 |

The table shows that 60% of SHG participants reported facing resource constraints such as a lack of financial support, inadequate training programs, and insufficient infrastructure, while a significantly higher percentage of non-participants (85%) also reported facing similar challenges in their households or communities. Although SHGs help mitigate some resource constraints through group savings and micro-loans, resource limitations remain a challenge for many SHGs, hindering their overall effectiveness in achieving long-term empowerment goals.

**Leadership and Group Dynamics**
Another barrier impacting the effectiveness of SHGs is weak leadership and poor group dynamics. For SHGs to function effectively, strong leadership and mutual cooperation among members are essential. Table 11 shows the perceived effectiveness of SHG leadership and group dynamics based on survey responses from SHG participants.

**Table 11:** Effectiveness of SHG Leadership and Group Dynamics

| Group | Percentage Reporting Effective Leadership (%) | Percentage Reporting Strong Group Dynamics (%) | Number of Respondents |
|---|---|---|---|
| SHG Participants | 70 | 65 | 100 |
| Non-Participants | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Although 70% of SHG participants reported effective leadership within their groups, only 65% indicated strong group dynamics, meaning that some SHGs suffer from poor communication, conflict, and lack of cohesion among members. This can negatively affect the group's overall success, particularly in decision-making and the implementation of community development projects.

**Statistical Analysis**
To evaluate the significance of the challenges identified (social norms, resource constraints, and leadership issues), a regression analysis was conducted. The analysis measured the impact of these variables on the effectiveness of SHGs. Table 12 presents the results of the regression analysis, with resource constraints and social norms emerging as significant predictors of SHG effectiveness.

**Table 12:** Regression analysis for challenges impacting SHG effectiveness

| Predictor Variable | Beta Coefficient | Standard Error | t-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Norms (Gender Bias) | -0.32 | 0.05 | -6.40 | 0.000 |
| Resource Constraints | -0.28 | 0.04 | -7.00 | 0.000 |
| Leadership & Group Dynamics | 0.18 | 0.06 | 3.00 | 0.003 |

The regression analysis shows that both social norms ($\beta = -0.32$, $p = 0.000$) and resource constraints ($\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.000$) have a significant negative impact on the effectiveness of SHGs. On the other hand, leadership and group dynamics were positively associated with SHG effectiveness ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.003$), but the effect was weaker compared to the challenges posed by social norms and resource constraints.

**Interpretation**
The findings from this analysis support the hypothesis that challenges such as social norms and resource constraints negatively impact the effectiveness of SHGs. Although SHG participation offers numerous benefits, these challenges continue to limit the full potential of SHGs in empowering rural women.

- **Social Norms**: The study revealed that traditional gender roles and societal resistance to women's empowerment significantly hinder the impact of SHGs. Despite being a part of SHGs, many women still face opposition from their families or communities, which limits their autonomy and decision-making power.
- **Resource Constraints**: Limited resources, particularly financial support and access to training, also constrain the effectiveness of SHGs. Many SHGs struggle to secure sufficient funding and provide adequate training programs, which impacts their ability to achieve sustainable growth and improve members' livelihoods.
- **Leadership and Group Dynamics**: While some SHGs have strong leadership and good group dynamics, others suffer from weak leadership, which impacts group cohesion and decision-making. Improving leadership skills and fostering stronger group dynamics could enhance the overall effectiveness of SHGs.

These findings highlight the need for interventions that address social norms and provide additional resources to SHGs. Effective leadership training and support are also crucial in ensuring that SHGs reach their full potential as agents of women's empowerment.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the socio-economic impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on rural women, focusing on aspects such as income, financial independence, access to education, healthcare, skill development, and the challenges faced by SHGs. The findings reveal that SHGs play a significant role in enhancing the socio-economic status of rural women by improving their income levels, providing greater financial independence, and fostering improved access to essential services such as education and healthcare. The analysis demonstrated that SHG participants earned higher incomes, had better control over household finances, and provided their families with improved educational and healthcare opportunities compared to non-participants.

Moreover, the study found that SHGs contribute to skill development, equipping women with the necessary vocational skills to improve their livelihoods and increase their participation in economic activities. This reinforces the view that SHGs empower women by providing not only financial resources but also social and educational support.

However, despite these positive outcomes, the study also highlighted several challenges that hinder the full effectiveness of SHGs. Social norms and deeply ingrained gender biases remain significant barriers, limiting women's decision-making power and participation in SHGs. Resource constraints, such as insufficient funding, inadequate training, and lack of infrastructure, also limit the capacity of SHGs to fully achieve their objectives. These challenges are further compounded by issues with leadership and group dynamics in certain SHGs, which affects group cohesion and the successful implementation of collective initiatives.

The statistical analyses supported these findings, with significant differences observed between SHG participants and non-participants in terms of income, access to education, healthcare, and skill development. The regression analysis also confirmed that social norms and resource constraints were key barriers to the effectiveness of SHGs.

In conclusion, while SHGs have proven to be effective in improving the socio-economic status of rural women, there is a clear need for targeted interventions that address the challenges posed by social norms and resource limitations. Empowering women within SHGs requires not only financial resources but also the dismantling of patriarchal structures and ensuring better access to education, healthcare, and skill development opportunities. Furthermore, enhancing leadership skills and improving group dynamics within SHGs can further increase their effectiveness, enabling women to better navigate the challenges they face and reach their full potential as agents of change in their communities.

This study highlights the importance of continued support for SHGs, as well as the need for policies that address both the structural and resource-based barriers that hinder the empowerment of rural women.

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