

QUANTIFICATION OF EMPOWERMENT INDEX OF FISHERY SELF HELP GROUPS

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Introduction

In the paradigm of Gender mainstreaming, we generally focus on equity and equality of both men and women the praxis of which is manifested through empowerment. Empowerment is a process whereby women become enlightened, and thus, increase their own self-reliance to assert their independent right to make choice and control over the resources. This would assist them in challenging and eliminating the factors that subjugate them. The Self Help Groups (SHG), being the grass root level institution for improving the life of women on various social, political and economic components, play a vital role in bringing about women empowerment in our country. Women empowerment can be operationally defined as the difference in the extent of empowerment level of women in the present context between the empowerment level prior to the formation of SHG, based on the sub-dimensions, such as confidence building, self esteem, decision making pattern, capacity building, psychological empowerment, social empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment. Empowerment Index, which has got immense practical utility, is used to assign an order of priority to the measured empowerments, by comparing them among themselves.

Now let's see the various sub-dimensions of empowerment in detail with a measurement perspective as given below:

1. **Confidence building:** It depicts the extent to which an SHG member is confident to participate in various discussions within and outside the SHG and also to use the skills acquired through SHG. The different categories included are confidence built within family, confidence built within SHG, confidence built within public meetings, improvement in technical and practical skills through training, acquisition of skills for income generation, use of skills for income generation, development of managerial skills, ability to facilitate a group meeting and addition to literacy/education.
2. **Self-esteem:** Self-esteem of group members is measured to assess how the members perceive their own image in different areas. It is worked out by keeping four major variables viz., self-image in the family, self image in the community, self reliance/Independence and feeling of security.
3. **Decision making pattern:** It is the degree to which the respondent makes a decision regarding children's education, family planning, buying and selling land, property and households, family and social functions and finally in Group meeting/Public gatherings.
4. **Capacity building:** It is determined on the basis of the ability of members to take risk, understand and solve problems, try new ventures and ability to take criticism.
5. **Psychological empowerment:** The level of psychological empowerment is measured by the SHG members' perception about future and satisfaction. The two major components used for measuring psychological empowerment are hope and overall satisfaction.
6. **Social empowerment:** Social empowerment is measured, covering the aspects such as team spirit, communication skill, participation in group activity, leadership, reduction in domestic violence, attitudes towards dowry, superstition, freedom and empowerment of women.

7. **Economic empowerment:** It refers to the economic background of SHG members. For measuring the level of economic empowerment, four major variables are selected. These variables include making household purchase, income, indebtedness and repayment, access to loan and control of use of credit.
8. **Political empowerment:** It is the degree of perception of SHG members towards political aspects. The variables included for measuring the level of political empowerment are participation in *Panchayat Raj* elections and changes in political views.

For the computation of Empowerment Index (Em I), the scores obtained for each of the above mentioned sub dimensions are made uniform. These scores are then added to get the EmI score of each respondent.

Utility of Empowerment Index

Empowerment Index is used to assign an order of priority to the measured empowerments, by comparing them among themselves. An empowerment index is employed to rank the identified sub dimensions of empowerment like confidence building, self esteem, decision making pattern, capacity building, psychological empowerment, social empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment. There is immense practical utility of this Index as it is often inevitable in social sciences, to assess the extent of empowerment and capacity building initiatives of group enterprises and independent ventures. The scale can be used in similar future research aspects for measuring the effectiveness of the group for larger applications ensuring sustainability.

Computation Technique of Empowerment Index

All these sub-dimensions are measured by a set of inventories containing appropriate questions arranged in a three-point continuum of “always, sometimes and never” with scoring pattern 3, 2 and 1 for positive and vice versa for negative questions. An empowerment index is employed to rank the identified sub dimensions of empowerment. The responses from the SHG members are collected under two conditions, i.e., before joining the SHG and after joining the SHG. By totaling the value assigned to each dimension of an empowerment component, an actual score was obtained for each empowerment component. Minimum and maximum values are set in order to transform the actual scores into indices between 0 and 1. Standardization is done to make it unit free using below given formula.

$$\text{Empowerment index} = \frac{(\text{Actual score} - \text{Minimum score})}{(\text{Maximum score} - \text{Minimum score})}$$

Based on the score obtained on the empowerment index, empowerments are classified into low (Up to 0.33), medium (0.33-0.66) and high (above 0.66) based on the score obtained on the empowerment index. An actual score is obtained for each empowerment by totaling the value assigned to each dimension of an empowerment. Minimum and maximum values are set in order to transform the actual scores into indices between 0 and 1. Standardization is done to make it unit free using below given formula, empowerments are classified into low, medium and high.

In the standardization of the Empowerment Index scale, each dimension is assigned weightage by expert judges and the actual score obtained for each dimension by totaling the sub-dimensions, will be multiplied with the corresponding weightages by scale product method and then compute the empowerment index score. The dimensions with weightages and sub-dimensions of Empowerment Index are as follows:

Self-confidence (weightage 1):

- ❖ Confidence built within family
- ❖ Confidence built within SHG meetings
- ❖ Confidence built within public meetings
- ❖ Improvement in technical and practical

- ❖ Skills through training
- ❖ Acquisition of skills for income generation
- ❖ Use of skills for income generation
- ❖ Development of managerial skills, ability to
- ❖ facilitate a group meeting
- ❖ Addition to literacy/education

Self-esteem (weightage 1):

- ❖ Self image in the family
- ❖ Self image in the community
- ❖ Self –reliance/Independence
- ❖ Feeling of security

Decision making pattern (weightage 1.1):

- ❖ Children’s education
- ❖ Family planning
- ❖ Buying and selling land, property and households
- ❖ Family and social functions
- ❖ SHG meeting/Public gatherings

Capacity building (Weightage 1.4):

- ❖ Ability to take risk
- ❖ Ability to understand and solve problems
- ❖ Ability to try new ventures
- ❖ Ability to take criticism

Psychological empowerment (Weightage 1.1):

- ❖ Hope
- ❖ Overall mental satisfaction

Social empowerment (Weightage 1.6):

- ❖ Team spirit
- ❖ Communication skill
- ❖ Reception skill
- ❖ Processing skill
- ❖ Expression Skill
- ❖ Feedback orientation
- ❖ Participation in group activity
- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Reduction in domestic violence
- ❖ Attitudes towards dowry, superstition freedom and empowerment of women

Economic empowerment (Weightage 1.8):

- Make household purchases
- Income, Indebtedness and repayment
- Access to loan
- Control of use of credit

Political Empowerment (Weightage 1):

- ❖ strong political stand
- ❖ improvement in the political views
- ❖ during SHG stabilization
- ❖ after self help phase

Output and interpretation of results

A practical example of assessing the extent of Empowerment of SHG members: Empowerment index was specifically modified in this context and was used to analyze the extent of empowerment of women through the formation of SHGs in the green mussel growing belts of Kasargod and Kozhikode districts of Kerala under the research project titled 'Gender Main streaming and Impact of SHGs in Marine Fisheries Sector of Kerala'. To achieve the objectives of the study, information was collected on selected sub-dimensions before and after the respondent woman had joined SHG. Difference between before and after index was taken as the extent of empowerment of SHG members. It was observed from Table 1 that, prior to the formation of SHG, the overall empowerment (combined score of all the eight empowerment variables) was found to be medium (0.34). In case of individual empowerment variables, respondents possessed medium empowerment in decision making (0.38), confidence building (0.35), self-esteem (0.34), and social empowerment (0.34). Joining in the SHG helped the members to attain higher empowerment for decision making, self-esteem, confidence building, capacity building, social empowerment, and economic empowerment. Among these, the variable with highest empowering potential, namely decision making pattern was ranked highest with an index value of 0.79 followed by confidence building (0.78).

Table 1. Extent of empowerment level through entrepreneurial activities of fishery SHGs

Sl. No.	Parameters	Before (Mean Score)	After (Mean Score)	Shift
	Confidence building	0.35	0.78	0.43
	Economic empowerment	0.33	0.75	0.42
	Decision making pattern	0.38	0.79	0.41
	Self-esteem	0.34	0.72	0.38
	Social empowerment	0.34	0.72	0.38
	Capacity building	0.32	0.67	0.35
	Political Empowerment	0.28	0.62	0.34
	Psychological empowerment	0.30	0.66	0.33
	Overall empowerment	0.34	0.73	0.39

Note: On an average the SHGs were found to be 8 years old.

It was observed that, in building the confidence of women, the SHG has played a major role. The second change was observed in economic empowerment *i.e.* from low (0.33) to a high (0.75) level of empowerment. Psychological and political empowerments are found to shift from low to a medium level of empowerment. Similarly, Das (2012) had reported that about 73 percent of the SHG members remarked that, their participation in the political process was almost nil in the Barak valley of Assam. Overall empowerment was found to shift from medium level of empowerment to high level of empowerment.

The SHGs undertaking value addition activity in fisheries were found to possess higher confidence and economic empowerment. Members in the value added activity participated in many exhibitions for representing their group and variety products developed by them and this increased their confidence compared to other groups. The profit received per individual was also observed to be higher for value addition activity group. Overall empowerment was found to be more in those SHG members who are engaged in value addition, aided by

their higher involvement in the activity. It was observed that, confidence building was significantly associated with involvement in the entrepreneurial activities of SHGs and economic empowerment. This depicted that, confidence was developed through economic activities that raised the income of the respondents. Self-esteem depicted self-image in the family and society, self-reliance and feeling of security was found to be significantly and positively associated with education, extension contact, training attended, and involvement in the activity. This showed that, self-esteem had positive association with interpersonal communication network. Decision making pattern was positively and significantly associated with involvement in the entrepreneurial activities. This depicted that entrepreneurs had to take decisions on their own without considering their image (self-esteem). Psychological empowerment was found to be significantly and positively associated with extension contact and involvement in the entrepreneurial activities. This indicated that, the hope and overall satisfaction might have come through interpersonal interaction with change agents for better economic involvement which also improved the image of the person in the community. Economic empowerment was observed to be positively and significantly associated with education, type of family and involvement in the entrepreneurial activity.

Conclusion

For the development of women entrepreneurship, political and social empowerment of women are essential for reducing unemployment in the rural areas in India and these can be achieved through the formation of SHGs. Overall empowerment, in the example given above, was found out by adding the scores of all the eight empowerment dimensions. This was observed to be varied across the districts and between the activity groups. The number of women inclined towards SHG is increasing, which implies that, women are aspiring for empowerment. There was a subtle increase in self-confidence, economic empowerment and decision making pattern of women due to the involvement in the entrepreneurial and other activities of SHGs. However, much needs to be done to improve the contribution of extension contact, training on confidence building and economic empowerment. This scale on Empowerment Index can be used for measuring the extent of empowerment of SHGs of both men and women in any key areas on a sustainable basis.

Suggested readings

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