



The power of the collective empowers women: Evidence from self-help groups in India

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Our Question

What is the impact of women's membership in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on various aspects their empowerment in agriculture?

What are the possible pathways of impact: which domains tend to show the most change?

Why would SHG membership affect women's empowerment?

- SHGs are groups of 10-20 women from the same community, who meet once a week to deposit money into a common pot and can take a loan from this common pot.
- What are the channels to empowerment?
 - Mobility
 - Voice
 - Agency
 - Social capital

Why is it important?

- Significant resources are being invested by government and NGOs to form and strengthen SHGs. Hence, more research is needed into the effects of these groups on the lives of their beneficiaries.
- Women's empowerment is important – as goal itself and has been shown to have linkages with various other development goals.
- In the Indian context, given the low status of women in society, their empowerment becomes a particularly important issue.



LAFARGE DURAGRAM

DATA

Data


- Two rounds of panel data from 8 districts in 5 states of eastern and central India. (Baseline survey – **2015** & Midline survey – **2017**)
- Sample selection criteria included ever-married women between 15-49 years old and was not conditioned on SHG membership. At baseline approximately 38% of the female respondents in our sample belonged to an SHG. This number rose to 50% by midline.
- The final sample size at baseline was **2744 women** and at midline was **2460 women**. The women's empowerment modules were administered to a subsample of **1470 women**, which forms the sample for our analysis.
- Our study uses data collected on women's empowerment in agriculture, as measured by the abbreviated WEAI (a-WEAI). The a-WEAI module was administered to both male and female respondents.

Outcomes

1. Composite A-WEAI indicators:
 - a. the 5DE score for the respondent woman and
 - b. the measure of the gender gap between the respondent woman and her husband
2. Across the 5 domains – production, resources, income, leadership and time-use – the 6 binary indicators that are used to compute the 5DE score
3. Additional measures of empowerment measuring mobility, attitudes towards intimate partner violence, respect within the household.
4. Male empowerment outcomes

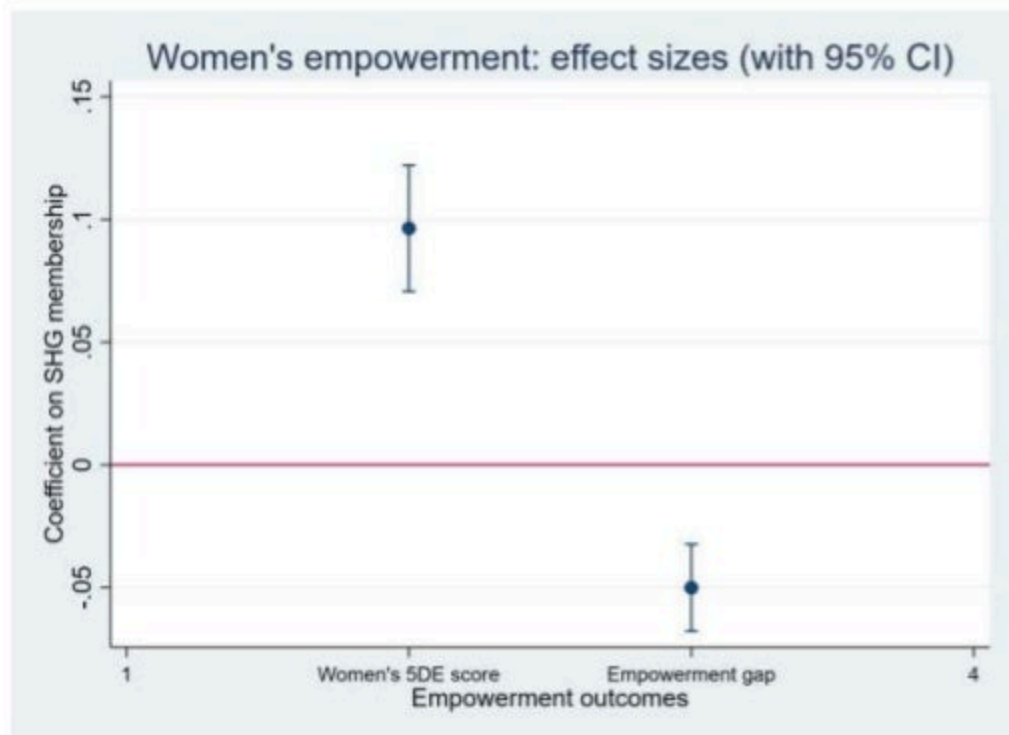
Methods

- SHG groups were not randomly introduced across our sample, we use **nearest-neighbour matching methods (NNM)**
- The comparison group sample of non-members is selected based on similarity to the SHG member sample in observable characteristics
- The characteristics we use to match are
 - respondent woman characteristics (*e.g. age, education, marital status, women's time use*)
 - household characteristics (*e.g. household size, presence of husband, mother-in-law and father-in-law, caste in household, land ownership, dependency ratio etc.*)
 - village level characteristics (*e.g. Average years of schooling, land and livestock owned, presence of a school, AWC and electricity, distance to nearest town*)



RESULTS

Women's empowerment score and the empowerment gap



- We find significant impacts of SHG membership on the women's empowerment score and the empowerment gap.
- Being an SHG member
 - causes an increase of 9.6 pp in the overall female empowerment scores ($p < 0.01$) and
 - reduces the gap between male and female empowerment scores within a household by 5 pp ($p < 0.01$)

Impacts on empowerment domains – Binary A-WEAI indicators

	Production Domain	Resources Domain		Income Domain	Leadership Domain	Time Domain
Dependent Variable	0/1: Input in decisions in at least 2 domains	0/1: Solely/ jointly owns at least two small assets or one large asset (including land)	0/1: Adequate in the credit domain	0/1: Input in income decisions in at least one domain	0/1: Active member of at least one group	0/1: Works less than 10.5 hours per day
Women belongs to SHG	0.0331 (0.0205)	0.0105** (0.00417)	0.0918*** (0.0292)	0.0222** (0.0106)	0.411*** (0.0195)	-0.0504* (0.0298)
N	1465	1467	1467	1466	1467	1467
Control Mean	0.825	0.992	0.6	0.944	0.024	0.485

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Impact on additional empowerment indicators and male empowerment outcomes

- We see no impacts on indicators of attitudes towards domestic violence and respect within the household.
- Significant impact seen on mobility indicator i.e. number of places visited on a regular basis.
- No impact on men's 5DE score.

Summary of findings

- SHG membership leads to improved women's empowerment outcomes:
 - an increase in the overall empowerment score among women
 - a reduction in the empowerment gap between spouses.
- Improvement in empowerment levels is largely driven by credit and leadership domain
- Limited impact on the production domain and the indicators on domestic violence and intrahousehold harmony suggests that gender norms are slow to change, and that SHG programming may need to deliberately address changing these norms
- **Empowering women does not disempower men.**

A photograph of three women in traditional Indian clothing, smiling and laughing. The woman on the left is wearing a pink and white patterned sari. The woman in the middle is wearing a red and white striped sari and has a red bindi on her forehead. The woman on the right is wearing a yellow and red striped sari. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

Thank you!

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