PERCEPTION OF EMPOWERMENT BY THE MEMBERS OF WOMEN SELF - HELP GROUPS IN GOAT FARMING*

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ABSTRACT

This is a study on the perception of empowerment by the members of women SHGs in goat farming, operating under Kudumbashree, in Thrissur district, Kerala. The study analysed members’ perception of empowerment through participation in women SHGs. Among 300 members engaged in goat farming for at least one year, 150 were selected through proportionate stratified random sampling. The data were collected through structured questionnaire and interview. Majority of the respondents (61.33 per cent) had medium level of empowerment followed by 23.34 per cent and 15.33 per cent as high and low levels of empowerment respectively. As for members’ perception of empowerment, domain of psychological empowerment scored first with a mean score of 1.93 followed by social empowerment (1.92), economic empowerment (1.91) and informational and technological empowerment (1.86). Empowerment perception had significant negative correlation with knowledge of goat farming and herd size of goats. Perception of empowerment of respondents having previous training exposure was higher than those with no training exposure. Also, perception of empowerment of illiterates was higher than that of literate members.

INTRODUCTION

The perspective of women’s empowerment is a multidimensional one that visualizes enhancing their potential to change those structures and ideologies that keep them subordinate. The empowerment process enables them to have greater control over their own lives and more access to resources and decision making. The Self help groups (SHGs) are small informal groups those enable women to come together, discuss and analyze their issues and problems and reap economic benefit out of mutual help, solidarity and joint responsibility (Anand, 2002). The group approach helps them do away with the social limitations and inculcates a greater confidence in the minds of rural women. Kudumbashree is a multifaceted programme organized by Government of Kerala and NABARD in cooperation with Panchayat Raj institutions through Community Based Organizations (CBOs) of poor women based on self-help strategy backed by thrift-linked credit. Kudumbashree aims at the empowerment of women, by giving them the central place in the programmes meant for their benefit.

The micro enterprises in Animal Husbandry sector have considerable potential as sustainable income generating activities for the rural women in SHGs. Especially, goat farming as a micro enterprise has special advantage for women since the management of goats is comparatively less labour and input intensive. The projects in goat farming are being implemented successfully by some SHGs under Kudumbashree. The present study analyses members’ perception of empowerment through participation in the women SHGs in goat farming.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The members of women SHGs engaged in goat farming for at least one year, operating under Kudumbashree in Thrissur District were studied. At the time of data collection, the members comprised a total of 300 in 30 SHGs. Among them, 150 were selected for the study using proportionate stratified random sampling.

Perception of Empowerment : In the present study, empowerment was operationally defined as the process by which one acquires power to exert control over the economic, social,
Economic empowerment was operationally defined as the extent to which the members of the SHGs have gained power to access economic resources and control over economic activities such as management of income, expenditure and satisfaction of material needs. Social empowerment was operationally defined as the extent to which the members of the SHGs have gained power to improve their status both in the family and society.

Psychological empowerment was operationally defined as the extent to which the members of the SHGs have gained power through enhancement of their inner/mental strength. Informational and technological empowerment was operationally defined as the extent to which the members of the SHGs have gained power through acquiring more information and technologies.

A scale was developed to measure the perception of empowerment of women SHG members. Items for the test were identified after referring to literature and discussing with experts. Initially, the test comprised of 59 items; 13 under economic empowerment, 17 under social empowerment, 18 under psychological empowerment and 11 under informational and technological empowerment.

For the final selection, the items were subjected to relevancy rating by a panel of fifteen judges comprising of seven subject matter specialists from the Kerala Agricultural University, three experts from Veterinary College and Research Institute, Namakkal, two from Madras Veterinary College, two from Gandhigram Rural Institute and one from Rajiv Gandhi College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Pondicherry. The judges were asked to rate the relevancy of the items on a four point continuum viz., very relevant, relevant, somewhat relevant and not relevant with scores of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The midpoint of the four point continuum ranging from 15 to 60, the minimum and maximum possible scores was 38 which was assumed to be the cut off point for the final selection of items. The items having scores above this were selected. The final scale comprising of 54 items; 13 under economic empowerment, 17 under social empowerment, 13 under psychological empowerment and 11 under informational and technological empowerment was administered to the women SHG members, who were asked to rate the statements on a two point continuum viz., agree and disagree with scores of two and one respectively. The summation of scores for all the items of a particular respondent indicated the respondent’s score. The mean score of the respondent was calculated using the formula

\[
\text{Mean score of the respondent} = \frac{\text{Score of the respondent}}{\text{No. of items}}
\]

Based on the mean and standard deviation of mean scores obtained, the respondents were classified into three categories viz. High [(Above (Mean + S.D.))], Medium [(Mean + S.D.) to (Mean – S.D.)] and Low [Below (Mean – S.D.)]

Also, the mean score of the item was calculated using the formula,

\[
\text{Mean score of the item} = \frac{\text{Score of the item}}{\text{No. of respondents}}
\]

Further, the mean scores of the major domains were worked out using the formula,

\[
\text{Mean score of the major domain} = \frac{\text{Sum of the scores of all the items under the domain}}{\text{Number of items in the domain}}
\]

The major domains were ranked based on the mean scores.

Relationship between profile of respondents and respondents’ perception of empowerment: Kendall’s tau-b, Spearman’s Rank order correlation, Mann-Whitney U test and
Chi-square test were used to find out the relationship/association between profile of respondents and respondents' perception of empowerment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of Empowerment: Figure 1 reveals that as for the perception of empowerment, majority of the respondents (61.33 per cent) had medium level of empowerment. The empowerment level of 23.34 per cent of the respondents was high and 15.33 per cent had low empowerment.

Perception of Empowerment in various domains: Figure 2 indicate that as far as the members' perception of empowerment was concerned, the domain of psychological empowerment scored first with a mean score of 1.93 followed by social empowerment (1.92), economic empowerment (1.91) and informational and technological empowerment (1.86).

Relationship between profile of respondents and overall perception of empowerment: The relationship of age, working experience in SHGs and herd size of goats with members' perception of empowerment was found out using the Spearman’s rank order correlation. Table 1 showed that the members' perception of empowerment had no significant relationship with their age and working experience in SHGs. Further, it was also revealed that there was a negative and significant relationship between the herd size of goats and the members' perception of empowerment.

Table 2. Relationship of training exposure, literacy and type of family with members' perception of empowerment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile of respondents</th>
<th>'U' value</th>
<th>'Z' value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training exposure</td>
<td>237.500</td>
<td>-1.881*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>496.000</td>
<td>-1.550**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of family</td>
<td>807.500</td>
<td>-0.559</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at 10 per cent level
**Significant at 20 per cent level

The association of the members' perception of empowerment with their educational status, marital status, major occupation and subsidiary occupation was found...
out by Chi-square test and the results are given in Table 3. It can be seen that there was no significant association existing between the members’ perception of empowerment and their educational status, marital status, major occupation and subsidiary occupation.

Table 3. Association of members’ perception of empowerment with the educational status, marital status, major occupation and subsidiary occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile of respondents</th>
<th>Chi-square value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational status</td>
<td>10.26* at d.f 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>8.86* at d.f 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major occupation</td>
<td>8.49* at d.f 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary occupation</td>
<td>7.17* at d.f 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NS - Non-significant

Intercorrelations of perception of empowerment, knowledge of goat farming and attitude towards group activity: Table 4 shows that the members’ perception of empowerment had significant negative correlation with their knowledge of goat farming.

It is noticeable that as for the perception of empowerment, more than half of the respondents belonged to the medium category and the number of respondents in the high category exceeded that in the low category. This infers that there was a fairly good attempt on the part of SHGs in achieving its ultimate goal of empowerment through microfinance in goat farming. Similar findings were reported by Saravanakumar (2000), Meera (2001) and Palmurugan (2002).

It could be observed that the respondents had the strongest perception of being empowered in the psychological aspects followed by social aspects, whereas, that of economic aspects stood behind. This denotes that the members had a feel of greater intrinsic capacity that is an internal transformation of their consciousness that enabled them to overcome external barriers for accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Ambrose, 2001). Another valid conclusion which may be drawn from the above finding is that improvement in economic aspects is a necessary but not sufficient condition for empowerment. The paramount need for training is emphasized by the finding that the members perceived least empowered in informational and technological aspects. Puhazhendhi and Satyasai (2001) reported that the impact of SHGs was relatively more pronounced on the social than on the economic aspects. The finding is in contrast with that of Soundari (2002) who reported that SHG members’ mean empowerment score was highest for educational empowerment and lowest for social empowerment.

The significant negative relationship of the members’ perception of empowerment with their literacy and knowledge of goat farming may be attributed to the personality trait of the less literate and less knowledgeable members to perceive themselves empowered out of whatever benefits they received due to their participation in SHGs. As disclosed by some of the illiterate members to the research worker, they had started learning reading and writing Malayalam, after joining the SHGs. Participation in group could protect them from exploitations of various kinds. Also, the group served as an ideal forum for safe

Table 4. Kendall’s tau-b intercorrelations of respondents’ perception of empowerment, knowledge of goat farming and attitude towards group activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Perception of empowerment</th>
<th>Knowledge of goat farming</th>
<th>Attitude towards group activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of empowerment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.166**</td>
<td>0.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of goat farming</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards group activity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Significant at 1 per cent level
ventilation of their problems and apprehensions. However, the empirical question raised by this finding calls for further investigation. The possible explanation for the significant negative relationship between the members’ perception of empowerment and the herd size of goats is that the respondents might have found it difficult to sustain a large herd due to lack of infrastructural facilities and inadequate resources.

The significant positive relationship of members’ perception of empowerment and training exposure is consistent with the finding of Soundari (2002) who reported that dalit women with high participation in training programme were found to be empowered significantly higher than women with low participation. In this context, it is worth mentioning the opinion of Siwal (2002) that training is an important mechanism for enhancement of women’s participation in decision making and also that of Rani et al. (2002) that various kinds of training empowered the participants in leadership, economic and health and sanitation aspects.

REFERENCES