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Socioeconomic profile of WSHG (Women Self Help Group) members under Mission Shakti in Ganjam district of Odisha, India

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Abstract

Women Self Help Groups (WSHGs) formed under Mission Shakti have emerged as powerful instruments for advancing women's empowerment and sustainable rural development in Odisha. The present study was conducted to analyze the socioeconomic profile of WSHG members and non-members in the study area. Twelve independent variables—age, education, caste, family type, family size, landholding, occupation, annual income, mass media exposure, extension contact, social participation, and training received—were considered. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using suitable statistical methods. The results revealed that the majority (60.25%) of WSHG members were medium-aged, followed by 22.25% young and 17.50% old, while 67.50% of non-members were also medium-aged. Education played a vital role, as 42.75% of WSHG members had completed middle school, showing better literacy levels than non-members. A significant portion (66.25%) of members belonged to the OBC category, indicating the inclusive reach of Mission Shakti across socially diverse groups. Most members (70.75%) lived in nuclear families with small family sizes (69.25%), reflecting a shift toward compact family structures that favour better management and stability. Economically, 62.75% of the members were marginal farmers, and 22.50% were landless. Farming was the major occupation (56%), while 20.5% combined farming with animal husbandry. The majority (68.25%) reported medium annual income, highlighting improved financial conditions through group participation. Medium levels of extension contact (71.25%), social participation (78.25%), and mass media exposure (71.75%) further reflected the members' active engagement in developmental initiatives. Remarkably, 86.75% of WSHG members had received training, compared to only 35% of non-members, underscoring the program's effectiveness in enhancing women's skills, confidence, and livelihoods. Overall, participation in WSHGs under Mission Shakti has significantly strengthened women's economic independence, leadership, and decision-making capabilities, promoting inclusive and resilient rural development.

Keywords: Socioeconomic profile, women self help group, mission shakti, women empowerment, rural development

Introduction

India, a predominantly agrarian nation, derives much of its economic and social strength from the rural sector, where agriculture remains the primary source of livelihood. Women constitute a vital component of this agrarian economy, forming the backbone of rural development and community transformation. As per the Census of India 2021 ^[1] females constitute nearly 48% of the total population, and a significant proportion of them are actively engaged in agricultural and allied sectors. In rural India, women contribute extensively to crop production, livestock management, post-harvest operations, and value addition, thereby shaping the foundation of food security and household income. However, despite their immense contribution, rural women often face socio-economic

constraints such as limited access to education, land ownership, financial resources, and decision-making power. To bridge this gap and empower rural women both socially and economically, the Government of Odisha launched Mission Shakti, a flagship initiative aimed at promoting Women Self Help Groups (WSHGs) as instruments of change and empowerment (Nayak, 2024) ^[7]. These groups have emerged as dynamic platforms that foster financial inclusion, leadership development, entrepreneurial growth, and collective self-reliance among women (Mohanty, 2015) ^[4]. The present study was undertaken to analyze the socioeconomic profile of WSHG members under Mission Shakti in the study area, with special reference to variables such as age, education, caste, landholding, family structure, occupation, income, and access to extension and training

services. Understanding these characteristics provides crucial insights into the factors influencing women's participation, empowerment, and livelihood diversification. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable input for policy formulation and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening women's role in rural development and ensuring inclusive growth across communities.

Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted in Ganjam district of Odisha state. Ganjam, located in the southern part of the state, was selected purposively owing to its strong and sustained involvement in the Mission Shakti programme with the highest number of active Women Self Help Groups (WSHGs) in Odisha. The district has been a model for women's empowerment and community-based livelihood initiatives, making it an ideal location for the present investigation. Since the independent variables had already produced their effects, an ex-post-facto design was chosen for the study. This design provided a systematic blueprint for organizing data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings in accordance with the research objectives.

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the sample for the Study. The district, block and gram panchayat were chosen purposively, while the Villages and respondents were selected through simple random sampling. Ganjam district was selected for the study through purposive sampling due to its prominent involvement in the Mission Shakti program. Khallikote and Bhanjanagar blocks

were purposively selected from the 22 Blocks of Ganjam district. These blocks were chosen purposively considering the presence of a significant number of active women Self-Help Groups (WSHG) under the Mission Shakti program, making them ideal for the study. Eight Gram Panchayats, 4 from each block were selected purposively in consideration of their locational advantage and prominence of WSHG activities. The Gram Panchayats were Langaleswar, Bikramapur, Kanak and Keshpur from the Khallikote block and Dihapadhala, Sanakodanda, Jillundi and kulada from the Bhanjanagar block.

From each Gram Panchayat, one village was selected randomly, making a total of eight villages: Langaleswar, Bikramapur, Kanak, Keshpur, Jamapali, Sanakodanda, Jillundi, and Kulada. From each village, 55 respondents (50 WSHG members and 5 non-members) were selected using simple random sampling, resulting in a total sample of 440 respondents (400 WSHG members and 40 non-members). This comprehensive sampling ensured adequate representation of both members and non-members, facilitating meaningful comparison and reliable analysis of the socioeconomic profile under Mission Shakti.

Results and Discussion

A set of 12 independent variables, age, education, caste, family type, family size, size of land holding, occupation, annual income, mass media exposure, extension contact, social participation and training received were chosen and responses were collected using appropriate scale in a structured questionnaire and tabulated in the table

Sl. No.	Socioeconomic profile	Category	Members(n=400)		Non-members(n=40)	
			Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Age	Young	89	22.25	3	7.50
		Medium	241	60.25	27	67.50
		Old	70	17.50	10	25.00
2	Education	Up to Primary school	120	30	19	47.50
		Middle school	171	42.75	16	40.00
		High school	35	8.75	3	7.50
		Higher secondary and above	74	18.50	2	5.00
3	Caste	General	76	19.00	14	35.00
		OBC	265	66.25	22	55.00
		SC	39	9.75	3	7.50
		ST	20	5.00	1	2.50
4	Family type	Nuclear	283	70.75	29	72.50
		Joint	117	29.25	11	27.50
5	Family size	Small	277	69.25	29	72.50
		Medium	73	18.25	7	17.50
		Large	50	12.25	4	10.00
6	Size of land holding	landless	90	22.50	20	50.00
		marginal	251	62.75	17	42.50
		Small	59	14.75	3	7.50
		Medium	15	12.60	00	00
		Large	00	00	00	00
7	Occupation	Farming	224	56	17	42.50
		Farming+ Animal husbandry	82	20.5	13	32.50
		Farming+ Labour	45	11.25	7	17.50
		Farming+ Business	37	9.25	03	7.50
		Farming+ Business+ Service	12	3.00	00	00
8	Annual income	Low (below Rs 50,321)	52	13	25	62.50
		Medium (Rs 50,321 to 1,00,779)	273	68.25	11	27.50
		High (More than Rs. 1,00,779)	75	18.75	4	10.00
9	Extension contact	Low	56	14	11	27.5
		Medium	285	71.25	22	55
		High	59	14.75	07	17.5

			Mean=11.11 S.D=1.45		Mean=6.97 S.D=1.38	
10	Social participation	Low	31	7.75	14	35
		Medium	313	78.25	19	47.5
		High	56	14	07	17.5
			Mean= 15.50 S. D=3.30		Mean=11.50 S.D=1.15	
11	Mass media exposure	Low	65	16.25	11	27.5
		Medium	287	71.75	23	57.5
		High	48	12	06	15.00
			Mean= 17.22 S.D= 1.81		Mean=14.62 S. D=1.34	
12	Training received	yes	347 36	86.75	14	35.00
		no		13.25	26	65.00

Age

Age plays a crucial role in determining participation levels, leadership capacity, and the overall dynamics of an individual. In the WSHG group, 60.25% of the members were classified as medium-aged, 22.25% as young, and 17.50% as old. Similarly, in case of the Non-members, the majority (67.50%) were also medium-aged, while 25% were old and only 7.50% were young. The predominance of medium-aged individuals in both groups suggests that people in this age range are the more active, potentially due to their balance of experience, energy, and stability.

These findings align with Sajesh *et al.* (2011)^[10], Naik *et al.* (2012),^[6] Bhagyasree (2014)^[2], and Mubeena (2017)^[5].

Education

Education plays a vital role in shaping participation levels, decision-making abilities, and behavioural traits of an individual. Among the WSHG members, 42.75% had completed middle school, 24.25% had primary school education, and 8.75% had completed high school and 18.5% had completed higher secondary and above. In contrast, 32.50% of the Non- members had primary school education while 40% had completed middle school, and only 7.50% had attained high school education. The slightly higher educational attainment among WSHG members indicates that education may contribute to greater involvement and proactive decision-making within these groups.

Caste

Caste significantly influences social dynamics, access to resources, and opportunities for empowerment within communities. A majority of WSHG members (66.25%) were identified as OBC, with 19% from the general caste and 9.75% from the SC category. In contrast, among Non-members, 55% belonged to the OBC category, while 35% identified as general and 7.50% as SC. The higher representation of OBC individuals among WSHG members indicates that these groups may play a vital role in promoting social mobility and economic empowerment.

Family Type

Family structure significantly impacts social dynamics, resource allocation, and support systems within communities. In terms of family composition, 70.75% of WSHG members lived in nuclear families, while 29.25% resided in joint families. Similarly, among Non-members, 72.50% belonged to nuclear families, and 27.50% in joint families. This similarity in family structure between both groups indicates a collective preference for nuclear family arrangements, which reflect broader societal shifts towards nuclear family norms.

Family Size

Family size plays a significant role in influencing resource management, economic stability, and social support systems within communities. A large proportion of WSHG members reported having small family sizes (69.25%), followed by medium families (18.25%) and large families (12.25%). Similarly, Non-members also indicated a majority with small family sizes (72.50%). This consistency in family size across both groups suggests a shared preference for smaller households, which may facilitate better resource allocation and focused attention on individual needs. Moreover, the inclination towards smaller family structures may indicate a shift in cultural attitudes regarding family life, with an emphasis on quality of life and economic security.

Size of Land Holding

Landholding status significantly influences economic opportunities, livelihood security, and participation in community development initiatives. Among WSHG members, 62.75% were classified as marginal landholders, while 22.50% were landless. In contrast, Non-members exhibited a higher percentage of landless individuals (50%), with 42.50% identified as marginal landholders. The higher proportion of marginal landholders among WSHG members may be due to the reason that as a part of a WSHG, these members may gain access to shared resources, knowledge, and training that enhance their farming techniques and productivity, leading to increased income potential.

Occupation

Occupation plays a critical role in determining economic stability, community engagement, and the overall development of livelihoods. In the WSHG group, 56% of members were primarily engaged in farming, while 20.5% combined farming with animal husbandry, and 3% participated in farming alongside business and service roles. In contrast, among Non-members, 42.50% were involved in farming, with 32.50% also engaged in a combination of farming and animal husbandry. This indicates a higher predominance of farming activities among WSHG members compared to their Non-member counterparts. This disparity in occupational engagement suggests that WSHG members may have more access to resources and opportunities that enable them to concentrate on farming, potentially leading to better economic outcomes.

Annual Income

Annual income is a vital indicator of economic stability, quality of life, and access to resources within communities. In the WSHG groups, 68.25% of members reported having a medium income, while 18.75% classified themselves as

having a high income, and 13% were in the low-income category. In comparison, the Non-members showed a different distribution, with a majority (62.50%) classified as low-income, 27.50% at a medium level, and only 10% achieving a high income. The higher proportion of WSHG members with medium and high income indicates that participation in these groups may contribute to better economic outcomes and financial stability. Access to collective resources, training, and support networks likely empowers WSHG members to enhance their income-generating activities, leading to improved livelihoods.

Extension contact

Extension contact is essential for accessing information, resources, and support that can enhance agricultural practices and community development. A significant portion (71.25%) of WSHG members reported medium extension contact, while 14.75% indicated high contact and 14% had low contact. In contrast, among Non-members, 57.50% reported medium extension contact, with 27.50% at low contact and only 15% at high contact.

The higher percentage of WSHG members reporting medium and high extension contact highlights the collaborative nature of WSHGs, which can provide members with networking opportunities, knowledge sharing, and support from different extension agents. In contrast, the lower level of extension contact among Non-members indicates potential barriers to accessing important services, which may hinder their agricultural productivity and community engagement. The similar finding was also confirmed by Venkatesan and Vijayalakshmi (2015)^[13]

Social participation

Social participation is a key factor in building community cohesion, fostering collaboration, and enhancing individual empowerment. Among WSHG members, a majority (78.25%) exhibited a medium level of social participation, while 14% reported high participation and 7.75% indicated low participation. In contrast, the Non-members showed lower engagement levels, with only 47.50% having medium participation, 35% classified as low participation, and 17.50% reporting high participation.

The higher levels of social participation among WSHG members highlight the positive impact of group membership on community involvement and social connectivity. This engagement likely stems from the supportive environment fostered by WSHGs, which encourages members to collaborate, share experiences, and participate in community initiatives. In contrast, the lower rates of social participation among Non-members may reflect a lack of similar support networks, which can limit opportunities for collective action and community engagement.

Mass Media Exposure

Mass media exposure plays a critical role in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and enhancing community awareness. Among WSHG members, a significant majority (71.75%) reported having medium mass media exposure, while 16.25% indicated low exposure and 12% reported high exposure. In comparison, the Non-members showed a different distribution, with 57.50% having medium exposure, 27.50% classified as having low

exposure, and 15% reporting high exposure. This suggests that WSHG members are slightly more engaged with mass media compared to their Non-member counterparts.

The higher proportion of WSHG members with medium and high mass media exposure can be attributed to the networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities provided by WSHGs, which may encourage members to seek out and utilize various media channels for learning and engagement. In contrast, the lower levels of mass media exposure among Non-WSHG members may indicate a lack of similar support systems and resources, potentially limiting their awareness of important issues and developments that affect their lives. This finding are in line with the findings of Meenakshi (2011)^[3] Sreeram (2013)^[12] and Mubeena (2017)^[5].

Training received

Training is essential for enhancing skills, building confidence, and enabling individuals to take advantage of economic opportunities. A substantial majority (86.75%) of WSHG members reported having received training, while only 13.25% had not participated in any training programs. In stark contrast, among Non-members, only 35% had received training, whereas 65% had not. This significant difference highlights that access to training not only enhances members' practical skills but also fosters a sense of confidence and competence that can be transformative for their personal and economic lives. In contrast, the low training rates among Non-members suggest that they may lack similar support networks that facilitate skill development, potentially limiting their economic prospects and community engagement.

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Conclusion

Mission Shakti now emerged as a powerful catalyst for strengthening women's self-help groups, especially in rural areas where collective action has opened new avenues of confidence and participation for rural women (Padhi and Sahoo, 2024)^[8] The initiative not only nurtures solidarity among members but also equips them with financial literacy, decision-making abilities, and leadership skills. As SHGs grow stronger, women are increasingly stepping into entrepreneurship, taking charge of income-generating activities, and shaping their own pathways to empowerment

(Padhy, 2023)^[9].

It is concluded from the present study that the Women Self-Help Group (WSHG) members under the Mission Shakti programme in Ganjam district of Odisha demonstrated a moderate to high level of socio-economic empowerment compared to non-members. The analysis of the socio-economic profile revealed that a majority of the WSHG members belonged to the medium age group, indicating that women in their productive years were more actively engaged in self-help initiatives. Educational attainment among members was relatively higher than that of non-members, suggesting that education plays a significant role in fostering participation, awareness, and leadership within WSHGs. The study further revealed that most of the WSHG members belonged to the OBC category and lived in nuclear families with smaller family sizes, reflecting changing social structures and increasing preference for manageable family units. In terms of livelihood, a large proportion of members were engaged in farming and allied activities, and their income levels were generally higher than those of non-members, indicating that WSHG membership contributes positively to economic well-being and livelihood diversification. Moreover, the WSHG members showed better extension contact, higher social participation, and greater exposure to mass media compared to non-members. These factors collectively enhanced their access to information, resources, and opportunities for personal and community development. A significant majority of WSHG members had also received training, which played a crucial role in improving their skills, self-confidence, and decision-making capabilities.

Overall, the findings of the study highlight that the Mission Shakti programme has significantly contributed to improving the socio-economic conditions of rural women by enhancing their knowledge, income, and participation in development activities. Strengthening training interventions, ensuring better linkage with extension agencies, and promoting education among women can further accelerate the empowerment process in Ganjam district of Odisha and beyond (Samaddar 2023)^[11].

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