

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH MICRO FINANCE**J. KARTHIKEYANI****HEAD****DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE****KOVAI KALAIMAGAL COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE****COIMBATORE****DR. S. BENJAMIN CHRISTOPHER****ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF COMMERCE****NGM COLLEGE****POLLACHI****ABSTRACT**

Poverty alleviation is one of the major objectives of planning in the country and a number of programmes are being implemented to achieve this. Self-help groups is an effective instrument for the amelioration of the economic conditions of the poor. Improvement of women's social, economic and political status has now been widely accepted. The present study has been undertaken with the objective to examine the impact of Self-Help Group (SHG) membership on monthly income, to ascertain the opinion of members about SHG, to suggest measures for the effective functioning of SHGs. Hundred and twenty members have been selected by random sampling from the list of groups obtained from Mahatma Gandhi Ashram, which is acting as Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). One of the finest forms of poverty alleviation programme is the formation of SHGs. They do wonders in that the poor people's income level has gone up significantly. The members of the group make use of the funds they get from the banks in the most efficient manner that they are able to earn high returns. Government, both the centre and the state are voluntarily associating themselves with the SHGs, providing financial assistance. The growth of Self-Help Groups has to be ensured and their prosperity has to be sustained. In this direction it would be more helpful if the government charts out new programme assistance for marketing the products of Self-Help Groups.

KEYWORDS

Micro finance, Self Help Groups (SHGs).

INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation is one of the major objectives of planning in the country and a number of programmes are being implemented to achieve this. Self-help is an effective instrument for the amelioration of the economic conditions of the poor. Improvement of women's social, economic and political status has now been widely accepted. It is an essential pre-requisite for the empowerment of women. Mishra (2002) said that, "Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are organized as viable alternative to achieve the objectives of rural development and to get community participation in rural development programmes. In case of self movement, thrift and credit are the entry points of activity. Micro finance or provision of financial services to low income households has come to be accepted in policy implementation in developing countries as the most efficacious intervention to alleviate poverty". Micro finance relies on rotational investment done to motivate poor to empower themselves and to save for the future and use those resources during the time of need.

Dinker Rao (2003-04) defines, SHG as a group of about 20 people from a homogeneous class, who come together for addressing their common problems. They are encouraged to make voluntary thrift on a regular basis. They use this pooled resource to make small interest bearing loans to their members. The process helps them imbibe the essentials of financial intermediation including prioritization of needs, setting terms and conditions, and account-keeping. This gradually builds financial discipline among them. They also learn to handle resources of a size that is much beyond individual capacities of any of them. The SHG members begin to appreciate that resources are limited, and have a cost. Once the groups show this mature financial behaviour, banks are encouraged to make loans to the SHG in certain multiples of the accumulated savings of the SHG. The bank loans are given without any collateral and at market interest rates. The groups continue to decide the terms of loans to their own members. Since the group's own accumulated savings are part and parcel of the aggregate loans made by the groups to their members, peer pressure ensures timely repayments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several research studies have been conducted on Micro Credit in India and abroad. The results of some of the studies conducted in India and abroad are presented in the following paragraphs.

Jaya Arunachalam (1986) emphasized that women must break away from the accepted way of perceiving problems and must have the courage, foresight, and dedication to guide the programme through its difficulties and a small number of women from the community must be prepared to take a bold step.

Women in the savings and loan cooperatives of FUNDE in Central America describe their new roles, opportunities and responsibilities in the following ways: They have more control over what happens to them, they have great influence over decisions in the household, they have the resources to invest in their children's education, and they think of ways to improve their community and help it to become a good place for their children to grow up in (Judith Bruce, (1986)).

Anh.T. Le (2000), in his analysis of the determinants of immigrant self employment in Australia has found that the existence of enclave markers, ie, ethnic enclaves created through a common language provided more relevant prospects for self-employment than the concentration of immigrants by birthplace. Educational attainments, Australian labour market experience, the availability of capital, marital status, and job related characteristics are important influences on self employment outcomes.

Michael Tucker (2000) found that to reach a level of operational excellence required to become financially self-sufficient, Micro Finance Institutions require well-trained, honest and motivated management. But personnel skilled in business may be difficult to attract and retain in a developing country where such skills are in short supply and are well rewarded in the profit sector of the economy.

Dadhich (2001) has described the successful experience of a public sector bank, without the involvement of either the Government or any non-governmental organization (NGO) in India. He found that properly designed and effectively implemented micro finance could be a means not only to alleviate poverty and empower women but also be a viable economic and financial proportion.

Madheswaran and Anita Dharmadhikary (2001) have analysed the impact of SHGs in providing credit to rural women to help them uplift their economic status. The results obtained from their study show that the success of group lending are attributable not only to peer monitoring to other factors such as lending for consumption purposes, saving, rotation of saving by group members and not the least because of an active NGO.

Samar. K. Datta and Raman (2001) has described that the SHGs were able to provide various credit services such as business loan, consumption loan, loan for settlement of old debts and loan for other contingency purposes to their members. The findings showed that an increase in net income per member reduced the level of risk facing SHGs. Micro Credit and Empowerment have been examined by Sudha Rani, Uma Devi, and Surendra (2002) who ascertained that the

participation of women in Self Help Groups enriched the empowerment of women in these four aspects. When their participation is high in number of meetings, interaction with different officials, they are empowered to some extent. Their decision making power also increased with the period of participation.

Manimekalai and Rajeswari (2002) observed that these women have been depending only on agriculture and now have become independent. Apart from the improvement on the personal ground, the community as a whole has gained through the organization of the SHGs. Punithavathy Pandian and Eswaran (2002) have concluded that the Micro Credit has provided the rural poor access to finance without the burden of collateral through Self Help Groups which have empowered the women folk economically and socially.

Neeta Tapanis (2009) described that micro credit has emerged as the most suitable and practical alternative to the conventional banking in reaching the hitherto unreached poor population. Micro credit enables the poor people to be thrifty and helps them in availing the credit and other financial services for improving their income and living standards. The Self-help Group (SHG)-Bank Linkage Programme was formally launched in the year 1992 and aptly supported by the RBI through its policy support. The Programme envisages organisation of the rural poor into SHGs for building their capacities to manage their own finances and then negotiate bank credit on commercial terms.

Women's empowerment takes place when women challenge the existing social norms and culture, to effectively improve their well being. This is tested by Ranjula Bali Swaina and Fan Yang Wallentinb (2009) in their study 'Does microfinance empower women? Evidence from self-help groups in India'. It empirically validates this hypothesis by using quasi-experimental household sample data collected for five states in India for 2000 and 2003. A general model is estimated by employing appropriate techniques to treat the ordinal variables in order to estimate the impact of the Self Help Group (SHG) on women's empowerment for 2000 and 2003. The results strongly demonstrate that on average, there is a significant increase in the empowerment of women in the SHG members group.

Kessler, Ronald C, Mickelson, Kristin D and Shanyang Zhao (2011) explored that a new interest in self-help groups has developed among clinicians and social policy analysts as financial constraints increasingly have restricted the range of services available to clients of the human services system. The sample of 3,032 respondents was recruited from a random digit dial sampling frame of the coterminous United States. Eligibility was restricted to people in the age range 25 to 74. It was clear from the fact that many people in professional treatment also participate in self-help groups that this generally does not occur. By the same token, the fact that many self-help group participants also seek out professional treatment suggests that the mutual support model of self-help groups lacks something that is provided in the helper-recipient model of professional treatment.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study has been conducted to know the impact of the participation of the women in the "Self-Help Groups" to empower themselves and how far they are utilizing their collective strength to upgrade their status in society. The bankers can understand the members, through this study, what they are expecting from the banks. The Government can provide assistance to the groups based on their requirements. Also, through this study, the NGOs may be able to understand the credit need of SHGs and accordingly suggest to the banks for extending the ceiling of loan.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Success of SHGs exclusively depends on how the members associate themselves with the groups. In this direction it becomes highly important to examine with what purpose the members join SHGs. Further, SHGs play an important role of providing funds to the members through the banks. What are the purposes to which such loans are utilized by the members? Do they find the amount of loan adequate? SHGs are claimed to bring forth many benefits to the members. They enable them get economically empowered. What is the impact of SHG membership on monthly income? How do the members of SHGs at Anaimalai view the SHGs? What do they think about the SHGs?

In order to find solutions to all the questions raised above, the present study has been undertaken.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Accordingly, the following objectives have been framed. They are,

1. To examine the impact of SHG membership on monthly income
2. To ascertain the opinion of members about SHG
3. To suggest measures for the effective functioning of SHGs.

METHODOLOGY

Primary data have been collected through interview schedule, in order to ascertain the functioning of Self-Help Groups and the opinions of members about SHGs. Majority of the members are illiterates, therefore, interview schedule has been used to collect data. Hundred and twenty members have been selected by random sampling from the list of groups obtained from Mahatma Gandhi Ashram, which is acting as Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) to ascertain the opinion of members about SHG.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Self-Help Groups provide the benefits of economies of scale, cost effective alternative for different financial services, collective learning, democratic and participatory culture, a firm base and platform for dialogue and co-operation. Moreover, the benefits of Self-Help Groups are based on co-operation rather than competition. The SHGs are informal groups where members come together toward collective action for a common cause. The common need here is meeting their emergent economic needs without being dependent on outside help. The main objectives of Self-Help Groups is to inculcate the habit of thrift, savings, banking culture - that is, availing of the loan and repaying the same over a given period of time and in the process, gain economic prosperity through credit.

SOCIAL PROFILE OF SHG MEMBERS

The social profile of the Self Help Group members broadly includes their age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, type of family, total number of members and total number of dependents which are explained in the following paragraphs. Table – 1 has been prepared to know the social profile of SHG members.

I. AGE

The composition of members includes different age groups. Table-1 shows that of the 120 members, 24 (20.00%) members are with age ranging up to 30; 70 (58.33%) are with age ranging between 31 and 40 and the rest 26 (21.67%) are above 40 years. It indicates that the number of members is very high in the case of 31 - 40 age group compared with the other groups.

II. MARITAL STATUS

Of the 120 members, 106 (88.33%) members are married and 14 (11.67%) are widows. It is found that there are no unmarried women members in the selected SHGs. From the table it can be noted that the number of married members is high.

TABLE -1: SOCIAL PROFILE OF SHG MEMBERS

Particulars	Number of Members (N = 120)	Percentage to Total
i. Age		
i. Up to 30	24	20.00
ii. 31 to 40	70	58.33
iii. Above 40	26	21.67
ii. Marital Status		
i. Married	106	88.33
ii. Widow	14	11.67
iii. Educational Qualification		
i. Illiterate	99	82.50
ii. Educated	21	17.50
iv. Occupation		
i. Agriculture	61	50.83
ii. Business	20	16.67
iii. Unemployed	39	32.50
v. Type of Family		
i. Nuclear	101	84.17
ii. Joint	19	15.83

III. EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

The educational status of the respondents do not deviate much. Almost 99 (82.50%) of them are illiterate; 20 (16.67%) members have studied up to primary level and the rest one (0.83%) member has received secondary education. It is observed that the number of illiterate members is more when compared with other groups.

IV. OCCUPATION

The SHGs have members with different occupation. Out of 120 members, 54 (45.00%) members are agricultural labours; three (2.50%) are marginal farmers; four (3.33%) are small farmers; three (2.50%) members are running a petty shop; two (1.67%) members are running sweet stalls; six (5.00%) members are vegetable vendors and nine (7.50%) members are engaged in business activities such as appalam business, etc. Thirty nine (32.50%) members are unemployed. It can be seen from the table that the number of members are more in case of those who are agricultural labourers.

V. TYPE OF FAMILY

It can be seen from the table that of 120 members, the type of family of 101 (84.17%) is nuclear and the rest 19 (15.83%) members belong to joint family. It is clear from the table that the percentage of members is high in the first case.

ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SHG MEMBERS

The improvement in women’s participation due to group activities is quantified through the comparison of different parameters in pre – and post – group formation situations. One significant change that can be expected is the increase in the level of income. To examine whether the income levels of the members have gone up, the following table has been prepared. The table also shows the economic status of the group members.

TABLE – 2: ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SHG MEMBERS

Monthly Income	Number of Members (N = 120)	Percentage to Total
i. Before joining SHG		
a. Nil	39	32.50
b. Up to Rs.300	45	37.50
c. Rs. 301 – Rs. 600	34	28.33
d. Above Rs.600	2	1.67
ii. After joining SHG		
a. Nil	26	21.67
b. Up to Rs.300	22	18.33
c. Rs.301 – Rs.600	45	37.50
d. Above Rs.600	27	22.50

It can be seen from the table that of 120 members, 39 (32.50%) member’s monthly income before joining in this group is nil; 45 (37.50%) member’s monthly income has ranged up to Rs.300; 34 (28.33%) member’s monthly income has ranged between Rs.301 and Rs.600 and two (1.67%) member’s monthly income has ranged above Rs.600. Majority of the members are earning income ranging up to Rs.300 before they have joined the SHG.

Out of 120 members, 26 (21.67%) members do not earn any amount even after joining in this group; 22 (18.33%) member’s monthly income after joining in this group ranges up to Rs.300; 45 (37.50%) member’s income ranges between Rs.301 to Rs.600; 27 (22.50%) member’s income ranges above Rs.600. From the table it can be noted that the number of members with monthly income ranging between Rs.301 and Rs.600 is high when compared with other groups. Table - 2 shows the family income of SHG members. Out of 120 members, almost 120(100.00%) member’s family income ranging up to Rs.2000.

IMPACT OF SHG MEMBERSHIP ON MONTHLY INCOME

One of the prime objectives of SHGs is to enhance the economic independence of women. By undertaking different types of businesses, mostly collectively, women are able to upgrade their income level. Understanding this, many women are now willing to join the SHGs. To test whether there is really an increase in the level of income after a member has joined SHG, the following hypothesis has been framed and examined through paired ‘t’ test. While applying ‘t’ test, a section of the sample has not been considered. This section consists of 57 members who have just joined the SHG and who have not been earning before joining SHG. Since they are new comers, the possibility of earning income is quite remote. Thus, setting aside these members, the rest 63 members have been included for the ‘t’ test. These members have been earning income now and were also earning or just were not earning, before their entry in to SHG.

Ho: There is no difference in monthly income before and after joining SHG.

TABLE – 3: MONTHLY INCOME BEFORE AND AFTER JOINING SHG

Particulars	Before	After
Mean Income	Rs. 283.33	Rs. 571.43
Range	Rs. 100 – Rs. 800	Rs. 200 – Rs. 1000

Calculated ‘t’ value 14.901 d.f. 62

n = 63

Table value at 5 per cent level = 1.96

It can be seen from the table that the mean income of the group members before joining SHG is Rs.283.33. The monthly income before joining SHG has ranges between Rs.100 and Rs.800. After joining SHG, the mean income has increased to Rs.571.43. The monthly income after joining SHG ranges between Rs.200 and Rs.1000. Hence, it can be said that the member's income has increased substantially after joining SHG. Members whose occupation is agriculture, may not have regular employment and regular income but after joining SHG, they start a business and they earn regularly. As the calculated 't' value is greater than the table value at five per cent level, there exists a significant difference in monthly income earned before and after joining SHG.

The members whose occupation is business do not have sufficient amount to invest further to develop their own business but after joining SHG they get loan based on savings bank account and from Revolving Credit. They take it as a chance to improve their business and earn income regularly. Therefore, micro credit and self help groups are better schemes to improve the economic empowerment of the women. This implies that much effort has to be taken to popularize the scheme so that rural households can lead a better life.

MICRO CREDIT AND ITS USAGE

Micro Credit is distinctly different from other poverty alleviation schemes. Micro Credit continues to target the rural and urban households, with emphasis on women borrowers, provision of finance for creation of assets and their maintenance and bringing in greater quality of services. The beneficiaries are identified by Micro Credit providers themselves independently or through NGOs, Self Help Groups.

A. LOAN FROM REVOLVING CREDIT

Groups are to be rated as per the laid down procedures and efforts are required to rectify their weak areas. There is no uniformity of revolving fund assistance among groups by the sponsoring agency. In order to examine the number of members who have received loan from revolving credit, the following table has been prepared.

Out of 120 members, 82 (68.33%) members have got loan from Revolving Credit and the rest 38 (31.67%) have not got loan from Revolving Credit. Out of 82 members who got loan from Revolving Credit, three (3.66%) got an amount up to Rs.1000; 74 (90.24%) got an amount ranging between Rs.1001 and Rs.2000 and the rest five (6.10%) got more than Rs.2000.

It can be seen from Table - 4 that of 82 members, 21 (25.61%) members repay the loan on a monthly basis paying Rs.100, the monthly instalment of 42 (51.22%) members ranges between Rs.101 and Rs.200 and the rest 19 (23.17%) repay more than Rs. 200 on a monthly basis.

TABLE - 4: REVOLVING CREDIT AND REPAYMENT

Particulars	Number of Members (N = 120)	Percentage to Total
i. Loan from Revolving Credit		
i. Yes	82	68.33
ii. No	38	31.67
ii. Amount of Loan(n = 82)		
i. Up to Rs.1000	3	3.66
ii. Rs.1001 – Rs.2000	74	90.24
iii. Above Rs.2000	5	6.10
iii. Monthly Repayment (n = 82)		
i. Up to Rs.100	21	25.61
ii. Rs.101 – Rs.200	42	51.22
iii. Above Rs.200	19	23.17

Table - 4 shows that the majority of members have got loan from revolving credit, ranging between Rs.1001 and Rs.2000 and most of them are repaying the loan amount on a monthly instalment basis. The repayment amount of most of the members ranges between Rs.101 and Rs.200

B. PURPOSE OF GETTING LOAN FROM REVOLVING CREDIT

The members may utilize the loan from Revolving Credit for different purposes. They usually invest the amount in their own business or use it to start a new business or spend for children's education. Table - 5 reveals the purpose of getting loan from revolving credit.

TABLE - 5: PURPOSE OF RECEIVING REVOLVING CREDIT

Particulars	Number of Members (n = 82)*	Percentage to Total
i. To invest in the present business	13	15.85
ii. To start a new business	13	15.85
iii. To spend for children's education	10	12.00
iv. To meet family ceremonial expenses	1	1.22
v. To repay money borrowed from outsiders	7	8.54
vi. To meet medical expenses	34	41.46
vii. To meet household expenses	51	62.20
viii. To meet emergency needs	4	4.88
ix. To invest in family run business	2	2.44

* Multiple replies are involved

It is found that 13 (15.85%) members have invested the loan amount in their present business. The members may use the loan amount to start a new business. It is found that 13 (15.85%) members have used the loan amount to start a new business; 10 (12.20%) have used for their children's education; one (1.22%) has utilized to meet family ceremonial expenses; seven (8.54%) have used the loan amount to repay the money borrowed from outsiders; 34 (41.46%) have used to meet medical expenses; 51 (62.20%) have used to meet household expenses; four (4.88%) have utilized to meet their emergency needs; and two (2.44%) have used to invest in the family-run business. It can be seen from Table - 5 that majority of the members have used the loan amount to meet their household expenses.

C. TYPE OF BUSINESS

The members get a loan from Revolving Fund and use it for different purposes. They invest the loan amount in a common business or share among themselves and use it for different purposes individually. Table - 6 has been prepared to ascertain the type of business, started by the group members by using the loan from Revolving Credit.

TABLE – 6: TYPE OF BUSINESS

Particulars	Number of Members (n = 13)	Percentage to Total
i. Type of business started without the help of Revolving Fund		
i. Vegetable Vending	6	46.15
ii. Petty Shop	1	7.69
iii. Sweet Stall	2	15.38
iv. Cloth Business	1	7.69
v. Appalam, Pickles making, etc	3	23.08
ii. Type of business started with the help of Revolving Fund		
i. Road and Building Contract	6	46.15
ii. Cloth business	2	15.38
iii. Vegetable Vending	1	7.69
iv. Rice Business	1	7.69
v. Others	3	23.08
III. Adequacy of Finance		
i. Yes	12	92.31
ii. No	1	7.69

The members may invest the loan amount in their own business started already. Out of 13 members, who are running business already, six (46.15%) members are doing vegetable vending; one (7.69%) is running a petty shop; two (15.38%) are running sweet stalls; one (7.69%) is running a cloth business and the rest three (23.08%) are doing appalam business and pickles business without the help of Revolving Fund.

The members may invest the loan amount in a new business. It can be seen from the table that of 13 members who have started a new business with the help of Revolving Fund, six (46.15%) have started a road contract and building contract business; two (15.38%) have started a cloth business; one (7.69%) member has engaged himself in vegetable vending; one (7.69%) has started Rice business and the rest three (23.08%) have started other businesses such as soap manufacturing, appalam making, etc, with the help of Revolving Fund.

Micro credit ensures the poor women employment and income. Out of 13 members who have started a new business with the help of Revolving Fund, 12 (92.31%) members feel that the amount is enough to start a new business and the rest one (7.69%) thinks that the amount is not enough to start a new business and raised Rs.1000 from money lenders. Table - 6 reveals that majority of members are running vegetable vending and think that the amount is enough to start a new business.

D. MONTHLY INCOME

In the rural area women are involved in a wide range of income generating activities. Micro credit is given to the women through Self Help Groups for productive purposes by the banks. The economic empowerment of the poor women is the only means to poverty eradication. Table - 7 shows that the monthly return from the business, who have started a new business with the help of Revolving Fund.

TABLE – 7: MONTHLY RETURN

Monthly Return	Number of Members (n = 13)	Percentage to Total
i. Up to Rs.500	7	53.85
ii. Rs.501 to Rs.1000	4	30.77
iii. Rs.1001 to Rs.2000	1	7.69
iv. Above Rs.2000	1	7.69

It could be seen from the table that of the 13 members who have started a new business with the help of Revolving Fund, seven (53.85%) members earn a monthly return ranging up to Rs.500; four (30.77%) earn an amount ranging between Rs.501 and Rs.1000; one (7.69%) member earns an amount ranging between Rs.1001 and Rs.2000 and the rest one (7.69%) earns monthly return more than Rs.2000. Table -7 shows that the majority of members earn a monthly return from their business amounting up to Rs.500.

ASSISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT

SHG financing is in implementation in various forms in several developing countries, which is emerging as an alternative choice for alleviating rural poverty in India. The role of central banks in the micro finance sector brings out the commitment or otherwise, of the policy planners to assist development of sustainable micro finance in the developing economies. Table 6.34 has been prepared to ascertain the expectation of assistance from the Government.

TABLE – 8: ASSISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT

Particulars	Number of Members (N = 120)	Percentage to Total
i. Assistance from the Government		
i. Yes	16	13.33
ii. No	104	86.67
ii. Sort of Assistance (n = 16)		
i. Increased marketing facilities	3	18.75
ii. Increased transport facilities	1	6.25
iii. Quick disbursement of Loan	7	43.75
iv. Housing and other loans	5	31.25

It can be seen from Table - 8 that of 120 members, 16 (13.33%) members need assistance from the Government and the rest 104 (86.67%) do not expect any assistance from the Government. Majority of them are not in need of any assistance from the Government because they would like to get success on their own.

It is found that out of 16 members who expect assistance from the government, three (18.75%) feel that the marketing facilities should be increased, one (6.25%) member expects increased transport facilities, seven (43.75%) think that the time taken for disbursement of loan should be reduced and five (31.25%) think that individual loan and housing loan should be provided through these groups. Most of them think that the period of disbursement of loan should be reduced.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION THROUGH SHGs

Micro Credit programmes extend small loans to poor people for self-employment projects that generate income, allowing them to care for themselves and their families. The poor always need credit which the formal credit system and the Government's poverty alleviation schemes could not cater to. SHG is a mechanism to alleviate poverty and financing these SHGs will help eradicate poverty. How the members feel about the ability of SHGs in removing poverty is captured in Table – 9.

TABLE – 9: SHG AND ERADICATION OF POVERTY

Poverty Alleviation through SHGs	Number of Members (N = 120)	Percentage to Total
i. Yes	116	96.67
ii. No	4	3.33

From Table - 9 it can be seen that of 120 members, 116 (96.67%) believe that SHG can alleviate poverty and the rest four (3.33%) have no faith on alleviation of poverty through SHGs. Majority of the members believe that SHG can alleviate poverty.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are the suggestions to improve Self Help Groups.

1. Government should encourage and support NGOs to attempt group approach and create favourable policy environment for SHGs to easily open their bank account.
2. There is possibility of loss of resources of the poor if not protected adequately against any possible crisis. So there is an urgent need to streamline the norms that govern micro finance initiatives in the country.
3. Necessary steps should be initiated to solve the problem of shortage of the supply of raw materials to the members of SHGs.
4. Subsidy should be given to town panchayat also.
5. Government should encourage export of goods which are produced by the group members.
6. Government should bear the discount amount which is allowed by the groups on the sale of their products.
7. Creation of a separate cell for solving problems is needed.
8. Separate place for running the business, which are started by the group members, should be provided.

CONCLUSION

One of the finest forms of poverty alleviation programme is the formation of SHGs. They do wonders in that the poor people's income level has gone up significantly. The members of the group make use of the funds they get from the banks in the most efficient manner that they are able to earn high returns. Government, both the centre and the state are voluntarily associating themselves with the SHGs, providing financial assistance. The growth of SHGs has to be ensured and their prosperity has to be sustained. In this direction it would be more helpful if the government charts out new programme assistance for marketing the products of SHGs.

The groups which are organized by Mahatma Gandhi Ashram, Anaimalai alone are taken for the study. Therefore, the groups which are organized by other NGOs are not included. As the opinions of members are likely to vary over time, caution is to be exercised while generalizing the results of the study.

The success of a SHG depends solely on how well-knit is the group. In this direction, the group cohesiveness of SHG may be examined. SHGs could scale new heights only if the leaders possess the desired qualities. What are the qualities of the SHG leaders, how the leaders of successful SHGs differ from those SHGs which do not perform well may be studied so that pre-requisites for success could be prescribed. Yet another scope for further research lies in carrying a comparative study of groups between two block or two districts.

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