

Psychological Empowerment as a Mediator Between SHG Participation and Economic Mobility: A Gender-Based Multi-Group Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the role of psychological empowerment as a mediating mechanism between Self-Help Group (SHG) participation and economic mobility, while also exploring gender-based differences in these relationships. Drawing on empowerment theory and community development perspectives, the study aims to explain how participation in SHGs contributes to socio-economic mobility through psychological processes. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from SHG participants using a structured questionnaire. The proposed conceptual framework was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) along with multi-group analysis (MGA) to compare structural relationships between male and female participants. The findings reveal that economic conditions, institutional support, socio-cultural environment, policy support, and capacity-building initiatives significantly influence SHG participation. However, SHG participation alone does not directly translate into economic mobility; rather, psychological empowerment acts as a crucial mediating pathway linking participation with improved economic outcomes. The results also indicate gender-based variations, with women experiencing relatively stronger empowerment effects, while economic motivations influence male participation more strongly. The study highlights that SHGs function not only as financial platforms but also as mechanisms of empowerment and capability development. The findings provide important policy and managerial implications, suggesting that governments and development agencies should strengthen capacity-building programs, supportive institutional frameworks, and gender-sensitive SHG policies. Future research may employ longitudinal and comparative approaches and incorporate additional mediating factors such as social capital, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial orientation to further understand the pathways linking SHG participation with sustainable economic mobility.

Keywords: Self-Help Groups, Psychological Empowerment, Economic Mobility, Gender Differences, PLS-SEM, Community Development, Empowerment Theory.

1. Introduction

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become a powerful grassroots development process of alleviating poverty and empowering socio-economically, especially within developing economies like India. SHGs are community-based groups in which people, mostly women, mobilise savings, microcredit access, and collective economic activities. SHGs have been extensively marketed by the governments, non-governmental, and financial organisations over the last 30 years as tools of inclusive growth, financial inclusion, and livelihood expansion (Brody et al., 2017). SHG movement has also acquired momentum through massive programs like the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), which is designed to empower community institutions and ensure sustainable economic development among the

marginalised communities (Ministry of Rural Development, 2022). In addition to financial access, SHGs' participation has also been identified to have a chance of bringing psychological and social change to the participants. Psychological power in the sense of how people feel they are in charge, competent, meaningful, and influential in their socio-economic world is of great importance in the conversion of collective action into real developmental results (Zimmerman, 1995; Spreitzer, 1995). Psychological empowerment helps boost the confidence of individuals, their decision-making capacity and entrepreneurial orientation, which present better economic opportunities and upward mobility (Kabeer, 1999; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007).

Economic mobility is the skill of individuals or households to enhance their economic conditions as time passes by in terms of higher income, wealth, job creation and economic stability. Economic mobility can be achieved by participation in SHGs in the following ways: better access to credit, financial literacy, collective entrepreneurship, and social capital formation (Banerjee et al., 2019; Karlan et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the empirical research findings indicate that the effects of SHG participation on the economic indicators are usually mediated by psychological and social variables, such as empowerment, self-efficacy, and perceived agency (Brody et al., 2017). Group membership is a consequence of various structural and contextual factors, including Economic factors, institutional-supportive factors such as training programs, access to microfinance, and facilitation by government agencies or non-governmental organizations are also important determinants of encouraging group membership and sustainability (Garikipati et al., 2017). Also, social and cultural issues, like community, trust and social networks, affect the readiness of people to take part in collective economic activities. SHGs have an enabling environment, provided by policy and environmental conditions, such as government welfare programs and rural development programs (World Bank, 2021). Lastly, capacity-building spaces, i.e., skills development and entrepreneurial training, make members stronger and more effective SHGs.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are widely recognised as effective mechanisms for poverty reduction, financial inclusion, and socio-economic empowerment through collective resource pooling and access to micro-credit. However, existing literature has primarily emphasised economic outcomes such as income generation, employment creation, and improved savings behaviour, while paying limited attention to the psychological processes underpinning sustainable economic mobility among SHG members (Brody et al., 2017). In particular, the mediating role of psychological empowerment between SHG participation and economic development remains underexplored. Moreover, determinants of SHG participation—such as economic, institutional, socio-cultural, policy, and capacity-building factors—have largely been studied in isolation, resulting in a fragmented understanding. Additionally, gender-based analyses are scarce despite women facing greater socio-economic constraints than men (Kabeer, 2016), influencing empowerment trajectories differently. This study addresses these gaps by integrating empowerment theory and economic mobility perspectives into a unified framework (Narayan, 2005; Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006). The researcher tries to address the following research questions: (1) What are the factors that influence economic participation in SHG (economic, institutional, social, environmental and capacity building); (2) Does economic participation in SHG improve economic mobility; (3) Does psychological empowerment mediate the relationship between economic participation in SHG and economic mobility; and (4) Is there any significant difference between the relationship between economic participation in SHG and economic mobility between male and female participants through multi group analysis?

2. Review of related literature

Some of the important factors of self-help group participation and their influence on psychological empowerment and economic mobility are critically reviewed and presented below'

1. Economic Factors and Self-Help Group Participation

Limited access to formal credit, precarious job opportunities, and weak household income are among the economic constraints that have a significant impact on the participation of people, especially women in the rural and semi-urban areas, in the Self-Help Groups (SHGs). SHGs are community-based financial mechanisms that help to access microcredit, savings and livelihood opportunities while decreasing financial exclusion and reliance on informal financial systems. Previous research has emphasised that SHGs have a positive impact on financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and income generation of household members (Kabeer, 2005; Swain & Wallentin, 2009). In addition, SHG-based activities under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) in India have enhanced the financial stability and livelihood security of the members. These arguments lead to the assumption of the following hypothesis:

H1: Economic factors have a significant positive influence on Self-Help Group participation.

2. Institutional Support and Self-Help Group Participation

Government agencies, banks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development institutions have a major role to play in ensuring that SHGs are more active and sustainable. Good institutional arrangements offer financial support, technical advice, tracking systems, and support in the policy that improves the operations of SHGs (NABARD, 2020; Dhawan, S. et al., 2026). It is shown that institutional backing enhances access to formal credit systems and capacity-building programs and also boosts members' trust and engagement in the activities of SHGs (Mohapatra, S., & Sahoo, B. K., 2016). Besides, partnerships between financial providers and local organisations assist SHGs in keeping a check on their finances and ensure transparency, enhancing their credibility and operational efficiency (Harper, 2002). This kind of institutional support guarantees uninterrupted training, access to the market and financial inclusion of marginalised groups, which eventually spurs more participation in SHGs.

H2: Institutional support has a significant positive influence on Self-Help Group participation.

3. Social and Cultural Factors and Self-Help Group Participation

The social and cultural environment is critical to the propensity of people to participate in shared economic undertakings, including SHGs. Women in most developing societies are affected by social norms, gender roles and networks in the community, which affect their involvement in economic and decision-making processes. Research has indicated that good social capital, trust and collectivism in societies promote the membership of SHGs and cohesiveness (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer, 2002). Moreover, SHGs tend to become a socialising space, facilitating peer education and building solidarity among members of communities, which helps the marginalised people to break the customary chain of gender and improve their social positioning (Kabeer, 2012). The social approval of group activities and support for family systems thus promote increased membership to SHGs, especially among women who are interested in gaining economic autonomy.

H3: Social and cultural factors have a significant positive influence on Self-Help Group participation.

4. Policy and Environmental Factors and Self-Help Group Participation

The politics and wider socio-economic space influence the formation and activity of SHGs to a large extent. The policy programs like microfinance programs, rural livelihood missions and women empowerment programs result in providing a favourable environment in which SHG can be formed and expanded. Programs such as the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the SHG-Bank Linkage Programme in India have been transformative in ensuring financial inclusion, as well as in enhancing SHG networks (NABARD, 2020). These policy guidelines

offer financial subsidies, training, and institutional assistance that motivate people to become members of SHGs and engage in shared economic endeavours. There are also positive economic and infrastructure conditions, such as market accessibility, digital technologies and transportation networks, that help to improve the effectiveness and magnitude of SHG initiatives (Armendariz & Morduch, 2010).

H4:Policy and environmental factors have a significant positive influence on Self-Help Group participation.

5. Capacity Building and Self-Help Group Participation

Capacity building initiatives such as training programs, skill development workshops, and financial literacy sessions are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of SHG members. These programs improve members' managerial skills, entrepreneurial abilities, and financial decision-making capacity, thereby increasing their confidence and engagement in group activities (Apat, S., & Mohapatra, S., 2025). Training in areas such as bookkeeping, marketing, digital literacy, and business management enables SHG members to utilise microfinance resources effectively and initiate income-generating activities (Karlan & Valdivia, 2011). Capacity building also strengthens leadership and communication skills, which improve group coordination and long-term sustainability. Consequently, well-structured training and skill development programs are likely to increase active participation in SHGs.

H5:Capacity building has a significant positive influence on Self-Help Group participation.

6. Self-Help Group Participation and Economic Mobility

The involvement in SHGs has been extensively identified as a way of enhancing economic mobility among the marginalised groups. SHGs also help members earn more income and live better lives by providing access to microcredit, savings, and entrepreneurship (Banerjee et al., 2019). Empirical research shows that SHG membership can lead to increased household income, better asset possession, and increased financial security (Swain & Varghese, 2009). Moreover, joint savings and credit systems enable the members to deal with financial risks and invest in economically productive purposes like small enterprises, farm land and rearing of livestock. Consequently, long-term membership in SHGs may result in economic mobility and a low level of poverty.

H6: Self-Help Group participation has a significant positive influence on economic mobility.

SHG participation, Psychological empowerment and economic mobility

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) participation not only helps the women in the economic development of its members but also in psychological empowerment of the women, which in turn helps them to improve their economic mobility. Psychological empowerment is the development of self-confidence, motivation, perceived competence, and perceived ability to influence personal and social outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-Help Groups (SHGs) contribute significantly to psychological empowerment by encouraging regular savings, participatory decision-making, and collective responsibility among members. These practices enhance women's self-efficacy, self-determination, confidence, and leadership capabilities, thereby strengthening their capacity to influence personal and household decisions (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996). The collaborative nature of SHGs fosters peer learning, mutual support, and collective problem-solving, which reinforce members' sense of agency and social identity (Nayak & Panigrahi, 2020; Manvar et al., 2023; Mahato & Jha, 2024). Enhanced psychological empowerment subsequently promotes entrepreneurial engagement, financial planning, and resource utilisation, leading to improved economic outcomes and upward mobility among women members (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Roshan & Rahman, 2025). Further, psychological empowerment serves as an important link between SHG membership and better economic outcomes because the members' psychological empowerment

through their self-efficacy and leadership skills is conducive to the use of resources, training and social networks for sustainable economic development (Kabeer, 2005). Thus, it is assumed that

H7: Self-Help Group participation has a significant positive influence on psychological empowerment.

H8: Psychological empowerment has a significant positive influence on economic mobility.

H9: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between Self-Help Group participation and economic mobility.

SHG participation, Psychological empowerment and economic mobility: Gender Differences

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have proven to be important grassroots organisations to support women's empowerment and improve their economic mobility, especially for the marginalised communities. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) enhance women's empowerment by facilitating access to financial resources, social networks, and capacity-building opportunities, thereby strengthening their economic independence and decision-making authority. A systematic review by Brody et al. (2015) found that SHG-based economic interventions significantly improve women's financial literacy, self-confidence, and collective agency, leading to better livelihood outcomes. Furthermore, participation in SHGs fosters psychological empowerment and gender equality (Dhamodharan & Sunaina, 2024), while education, income, and social capital significantly influence empowerment outcomes (Mohapatra & Sahoo, 2016). Recent research has also underscored the contribution of SHGs in terms of financial inclusion, entrepreneurship and socio-economic resilience at the community level (Kumar & Kumar, 2024; Santhosh Kumar & Aithal, 2024). Psychological empowerment and economic mobility, however, can differ by gender because of differing resources available, cultural norms and societal expectations. On these understandings, it is hypothesised that.

H10: SHG participation positively influences psychological empowerment and economic mobility, and this relationship is significantly moderated by gender differences.

Theoretical framework of the study

The present study is grounded in **Empowerment Theory**, particularly its **process perspective**, which conceptualises empowerment as a developmental process through which participation in collective or community-based activities enhances individuals' control over their lives and access to resources. According to Marc A. Zimmerman, empowerment unfolds through a sequence in which **participatory experiences lead to psychological empowerment, which subsequently produces behavioural and socio-economic outcomes**. In the context of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), active participation in group meetings, savings activities, collective decision-making, and training programs provides members with opportunities to build competence, self-efficacy, and critical awareness. These experiences enhance **psychological empowerment**, reflected in increased confidence, perceived control, and the ability to influence economic decisions. In turn, empowered individuals are more capable of utilising financial resources, engaging in income-generating activities, and improving their economic position, thereby fostering **economic mobility**. This study, therefore, conceptualises **SHG participation as the antecedent (process), psychological empowerment as the mediating mechanism, and economic mobility as the outcome**, consistent with the empowerment process model. Furthermore, given that empowerment experiences and access to economic opportunities may differ across genders due to socio-cultural constraints, a **gender-based multi-group analysis** is employed to examine whether the strength of these relationships varies between male and female SHG participants.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the relationships among SHG participation, psychological empowerment, and economic mobility from a comparative gender perspective. Grounded in Empowerment Theory, the research utilised a structured questionnaire with constructs measured on a five-point Likert scale to test the proposed causal relationships and mediation effects. The measurement instrument was developed based on established theoretical foundations and prior empirical studies. Economic Factors (EF) were conceptualised using the Sustainable Livelihood Framework and the capability perspective (World Bank, 2017). Institutional Support (IS) was derived from Institutional Theory (North, 1990; Scott, 2014; Uphoff, 2000), while Social and Cultural Factors (SCF) were grounded in Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). In addition, Capacity Building and Skill Development Participation and SHG Participation were included to measure the extent of members' involvement in group activities and training initiatives. Psychological Empowerment (PE) was incorporated as a mediating construct reflecting perceived competence, control, and intrinsic motivation, with measurement items adapted from Spreitzer (1995), Zimmerman (2000), and Thomas and Velthouse (1990). Economic Mobility Indicators (EMI), the dependent construct, assessed changes in income, savings behaviour, livelihood investments, and intergenerational economic progress, consistent with prior studies on economic mobility (Chetty et al., 2014; World Bank, 2018). The study targeted members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) operating in the Devipatan region of Uttar Pradesh, India, where SHGs significantly contribute to rural livelihood enhancement and women's empowerment. A preliminary survey of 30 to 50 participants was conducted before the main survey to evaluate the clarity, reliability and contextual relevance of the items (Hair et al., 2021). Structured questionnaires and personal interviews were then used to supplement the data collection and improve the quality and accuracy of the responses obtained. The SPSS and SmartPLS 4.0 software were used for data analysis. SPSS was used to analyse descriptive statistics data, demographic analysis, and preliminary data screening, and SmartPLS was used to estimate the PLS-SEM model and test the hypotheses. Reliability and convergent validity were established using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) in the measurement model. The Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio were used for the discriminant validity. Common method bias was controlled for by procedural and statistical methods. Path coefficients, R^2 , f^2 , Q^2 , bootstrapping and multi-group analysis were conducted as part of the structural model evaluation. Table 1 indicates the demographic profile of respondents.

Results

The majority of the respondents (39.9%) were in the age bracket 26-35 years, followed by 36-45 years, suggesting that the majority of the respondents were economically active adults. The male respondents were 69.3%, and the female respondents were 30.7% of the sample. The majority of respondents were married (75.3%), while 23.9% were unmarried. The maximum percentage of people earned between Rs. 2501–5000 per month (29.7%), followed by Rs. 5001–7501 (19.9%) and Rs. 7501–10000 (19.7%). Few respondents (1.8%) reported earnings of Rs. The majority of those sampled were from a low-to-middle income population, as 15,000 were paid per month.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Description	Frequency	Percent
Age	Up to 25 Years	51	13.4
	26-35 Years	152	39.9
	36-45 Years	113	29.7
	46-55 Years	47	12.3
	More than 55 Years	18	4.7
Gender	Male	264	69.3
	Female	117	30.7
Marital Status	Unmarried	91	23.9

	Married	287	75.3
	Separated/Divorce	3	.8
Income	Up to Rs 2500PM	54	14.2
	From Rs2501 to Rs5000PM	113	29.7
	From Rs5001 to Rs7501PM	76	19.9
	From Rs 7501 to Rs 10000PM	75	19.7
	From Rs10001 to Rs15000PM	56	14.7
	More than Rs 15000 PM	7	1.8

Table 2 will give the descriptive statistics and factor loading of the constructs affecting Self-Help Group (SHG) participation, psychological empowerment, and economic mobility using 381 respondents. The loading of the factor lies between 0.692 and 0.978, which proves a good item reliability and a sufficient convergent validity. The Economic Factors (EF) demonstrate the range of 0.733 to 0.836 (mean = 3.9207; SD = 0.39164; variance = 0.153) of moderate agreement on money and financial access. The perceptions of institutional assistance have a greater variance (0.794) with institutional Support (IS) recordings of 0.692-0.902 (mean = 3.7832; SD = 0.89132; variance = 0.794). Social and Cultural Factors (SCF) show loadings of 0.795-0.907 (3.8803 at 0.68423 at 0.468), which depict positive perceptions of social cooperation. Policy and Environmental Factors (PEF) have the largest mean of (4.0283; SD = 0.76505; variance = 0.585) and loading of 0.819-0.978. Capacity Building (CB) has a loading of 0.823-0.965 (mean = 3.9108; SD = 0.75993; variance = 0.577). SHG Participation (SHGP) has loadings of 0.750-0.847 (mean = 3.2861; SD = 0.41769; variance = 0.174). The reports psyched to provide a loading of 0.795-0.892 (mean = 4.1039; SD = 0.51556; variance = 0.266), whereas Economic Mobility (EMI) enables the reporting of a loading of 0.723-0.890 (mean = 3.9588; SD = 0.58884; variance = 0.347) which is associated to positive economic results of SHG participation.

Table 2: Factors influencing customers towards SHG Participation, Psychological Empowerment and Economic Mobility: A Descriptive Statistics (N=381)

	Factor Loading	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Economic Factors (EF)		3.9207	.39164	.153
EF1	0.737	3.8924	.50935	.259
EF2	0.733	3.9659	.52455	.275
EF3	0.836	3.9265	.53789	.289
EF4	0.796	3.8399	.44495	.198
EF5	0.807	3.9790	.48621	.236
Institutional Support (IS)		3.7832	.89132	.794
IS1	0.888	3.9081	.97843	.957
IS2	0.797	3.7480	1.20505	1.452
IS3	0.692	3.6982	1.27350	1.622
IS4	0.902	3.7165	.96707	.935
IS5	0.897	3.8451	.97044	.942
Social and Cultural Factors (SCF)		3.8803	.68423	.468
SCF1	0.795	3.6903	.79049	.625
SCF2	0.838	3.7795	.84834	.720
SCF3	0.907	3.9213	.78075	.610
SCF4	0.900	4.0105	.74332	.553
SCF5	0.907	4.0000	.77460	.600
Policy and Environmental Factors (PEF)		4.0283	.76505	.585

PEF1	0.854	3.8478	.88134	.777
PEF2	0.930	3.9738	.85799	.736
PEF3	0.972	4.0997	.84013	.706
PEF4	0.978	4.0787	.82977	.689
PEF5	0.819	4.1417	.78865	.622
Capacity Building(CB)		3.9108	.75993	.577
CB1	0.907	3.7664	.91509	.837
CB2	0.920	3.8635	.82861	.687
CB3	0.958	4.0394	.76504	.585
CB4	0.823	3.9160	.82288	.677
CB5	0.965	3.9685	.82338	.678
SHG Participation(SHGP)		3.2861	.41769	.174
SHGP1	0.847	3.2835	.52662	.277
SHGP2	0.750	3.3753	.55566	.309
SHGP3	0.759	3.2152	.53398	.285
SHGP4	0.770	3.2756	.53818	.290
SHGP5	0.802	3.2808	.50511	.255
Psychological Empowerment (PE)		4.1039	.51556	.266
PE1	0.892	4.1706	.64054	.410
PE2	0.861	4.0971	.61432	.377
PE3	0.839	4.1076	.64193	.412
PE4	0.795	4.0525	.55000	.303
PE5	0.838	4.0919	.59777	.357
Economic Mobility (EMI)		3.9588	.58884	.347
EMI1	0.890	4.1837	.80971	.656
EMI2	0.860	3.7402	.74917	.561
EMI3	0.723	3.7743	.66211	.438
EMI4	0.828	3.9501	.72194	.521
EMI5	0.874	4.1076	.68937	.475
EMI6	0.822	3.9291	.65109	.424
EMI7	0.781	4.0262	.68775	.473

Factors Influencing Customers Towards SHG Participation, Psychological Empowerment and Economic Mobility: PLS SEM Modelling

Measurement Model

Construct reliability and construct validity assessments indicate that the measurement model has good internal consistency and convergent validity. The alpha values of all constructs lie between 0.841 and 0.951, which is greater than the recommended value of 0.70, and hence, it establishes a high level of internal reliability. In the same way, composite reliability values (ra and rc) of each construct exceeded 0.80, which implies that there is construct reliability and consistency across the items of the measurement. The values of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), 0.613-0.839, with the maximum 0.50, indicate convergent validity as the constructs account for a significant amount of variance in the respective indicators. Moreover, the values of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) are within the range of 1.000 to 1.804, as opposed to the critical value of 3.3, which proves that there are no problems with multicollinearity and the measurement model is robust.

Table 3: Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	VIF
Capacity Building	0.951	0.962	0.963	0.839	1.054
Economic Factors	0.841	0.847	0.887	0.613	1.804
Economic Mobility	0.923	0.926	0.938	0.684	1.019
Institutional _Support	0.892	0.897	0.922	0.704	1.520
Policy and Environmental _Factors	0.949	0.954	0.961	0.833	1.666
Psychological _Empowerment	0.900	0.907	0.926	0.715	1.666
Self-Help Group _Participation	0.845	0.847	0.890	0.618	1.000
Social and Cultural Factors	0.920	0.927	0.940	0.758	1.290

Discriminant validity was assessed following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2021), using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) approach (Henseler et al., 2015). Results confirmed discriminant validity for constructs. The square roots of AVE for each construct exceeded their inter-construct correlations, indicating that constructs shared more variance with their indicators than with other constructs. HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.90, suggesting adequate empirical distinctiveness among constructs. Some constructs were conceptually related; no substantial empirical overlap was observed. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated discriminant validity and was appropriate for the structural evaluation model fit.

Table: Discriminant Validity Assessment using HTMT Ratio and Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Constructs	CB	EF	EM	IS	PEF	PE	SHGP	SCF
Capacity Building (CB)	0.916	0.233	0.063	0.047	0.070	0.163	0.315	0.054
Economic Factors (EF)	0.211	0.783	0.311	0.144	0.640	0.806	0.731	0.526
Economic Mobility (EM)	0.057	0.279	0.827	0.105	0.347	0.419	0.345	0.221
Institutional Support (IS)	0.033	0.125	-0.068	0.839	0.103	0.093	0.266	0.057
Policy and Environmental Factors (PEF)	0.066	0.577	0.325	0.099	0.913	0.769	0.736	0.358
Psychological Empowerment (PE)	0.148	0.707	0.391	0.088	0.716	0.846	0.721	0.633
Self-Help Group Participation (SHGP)	0.288	0.621	0.308	0.233	0.658	0.632	0.786	0.494
Social and Cultural Factors (SCF)	0.048	0.462	0.205	0.022	0.336	0.573	0.439	0.871

Note: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion, while off-diagonal upper triangular values represent HTMT ratios.

Structural Model

The assessment of the structural model included in Table 5 supports the explanatory power, predictive relevance and adequacy of the proposed research framework. The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the proportion of variance explained in the endogenous constructs. The results show that Self-Help Group Participation explains a substantial share of variance ($R^2 = 0.599$), accounting for 59.9% of the variation. According to Hair et al. (2021), R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 represent substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power; thus, the present value reflects moderate-to-substantial explanatory strength. Similarly, Psychological Empowerment demonstrates moderate explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.400$), whereas Economic Mobility shows weak but acceptable explanatory

power ($R^2 = 0.159$). The Stone–Geisser Q^2 values for Economic Mobility (0.588), Psychological Empowerment (0.538), and Self-Help Group Participation (0.087) confirm predictive relevance. Further, RMSE and MAE indicate acceptable predictive accuracy with moderate error levels. Model fit indices reveal SRMR values of 0.063 (saturated) and 0.094 (estimated), both within acceptable limits, while NFI values (0.719; 0.706) suggest adequate though not optimal model fit. The results taken together confirm the robustness of the structural model and the proposed relationships between participation in SHGs, psychological empowerment and economic mobility among the stakeholders.

Table 5: R-square, Q^2 predict and Model fit summary

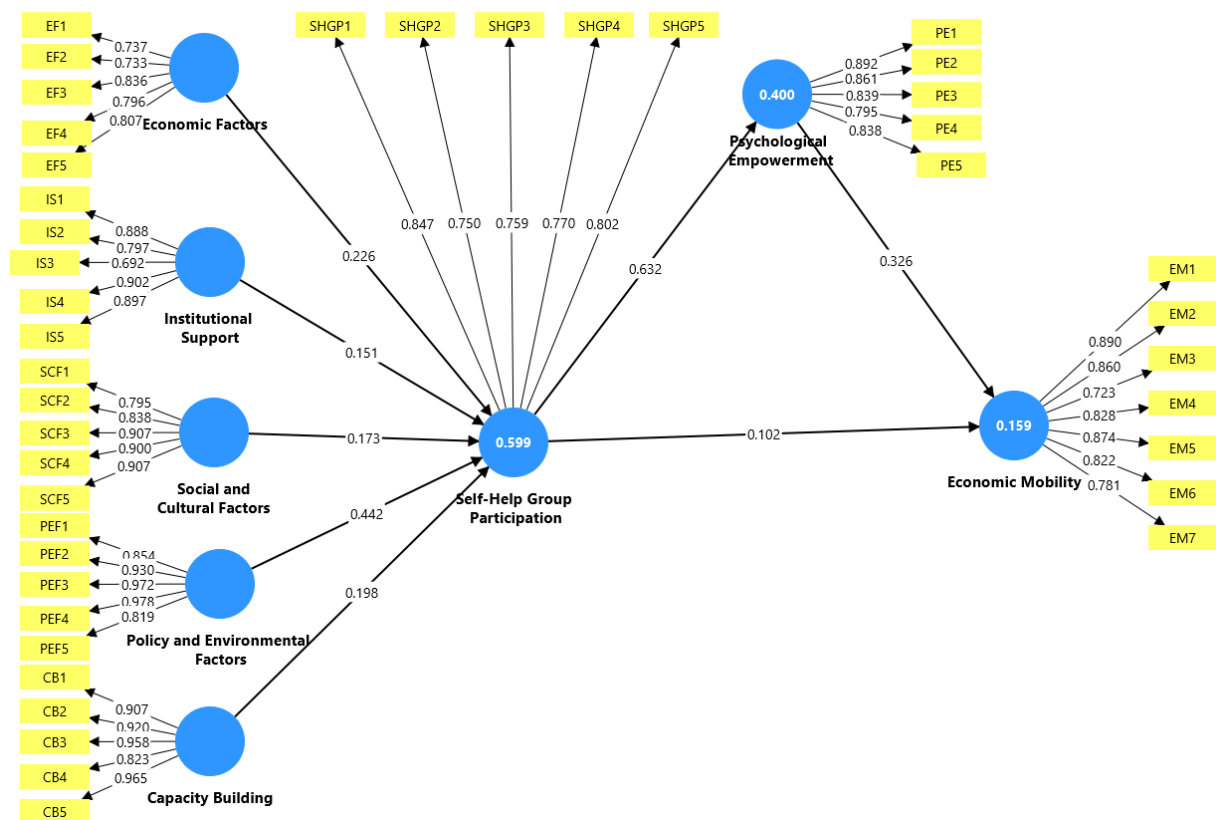
	R-square	R-square adjusted	Q^2 predict	RMSE	MAE
Economic Mobility	0.159	0.154	0.588	0.647	0.512
Psychological _Empowerment	0.400	0.398	0.538	0.684	0.532
Self-Help Group_ Participation	0.599	0.594	0.087	0.961	0.737
<u>Model Fit Summary</u>					
	Saturated model	Estimated model			
SRMR	0.063	0.094			
d _ULS	3.561	8.028			
d _G	2.800	2.997			
Chi-square	4805.014	5029.534			
NFI	0.719	0.706			

Based on the findings of the structural model (Table 6), the impact of the constructs put forward in explaining the Self-Help Group (SHG) participation, psychological empowerment and economic mobility are different. To the participation in SHG, economic factors also indicate a significant effect ($\beta = 0.226$, $t = 5.461$, $p < 0.001$) and a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.071$) have a positive effect, and the corresponding hypothesis is validated. In this regard, it is noticeable that the institutional support ($\beta = 0.151$, $t = 4.694$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.055$) and social and cultural variables ($\beta = 0.173$, $t = 4.879$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.058$) have highly positive effects, as well, with small effect sizes, which confirm the two hypotheses. SHG participation is most affected by policy and environmental factors ($\beta = 0.442$, $t = 10.371$, $p < 0.001$), and its effect is relatively high ($f^2 = 0.320$); that is, the supportive policies and environmental conditions influence the SHG participation significantly; therefore, the hypothesis is well supported. Capacity building also has a good positive outcome ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 6.621$, $p < 0.001$) with a small to medium size of effects ($f^2 = 0.092$) and the hypothesis concerned is accepted.

Table 6: Structural model and Path Relationship (Mean, STDEV, T values, p values)

	f-square	Path Coefficient (β)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ($ O/STDEV $)	P values
Economic Factors -> Self-Help Group_ Participation	0.071	0.226	0.041	5.461	0.000
Institutional _Support -> Self-Help Group_ Participation	0.055	0.151	0.032	4.694	0.000
Social and Cultural Factors -> Self-Help Group_ Participation	0.058	0.173	0.035	4.879	0.000
Policy and Environmental _Factors -> Self-Help Group_ Participation	0.320	0.442	0.043	10.371	0.000

Capacity Building -> Self-Help Group Participation	0.092	0.198	0.030	6.621	0.000
Self-Help Group Participation -> Economic Mobility	0.007	0.102	0.063	1.618	0.106
Self-Help Group Participation -> Psychological Empowerment	0.666	0.632	0.033	19.422	0.000
Psychological Empowerment -> Economic Mobility	0.076	0.326	0.061	5.322	0.000
Self-Help Group Participation -> Psychological Empowerment -> Economic Mobility	NA	0.206	0.040	5.141	0.000



Mediation Analysis

The results of the structural model in the form of a table (Table 6) provide several important results that can be analysed in relation to the relationships between participating in a Self-Help Group (SHG), psychological empowerment, and economic mobility. The results further show that there is no significant direct effect of the SHG on its members' economic mobility ($\beta = 0.102$, $t = 1.618$, $p = 0.106$, $f^2 = 0.007$), which means that membership in the SHG alone has little impact on their economic mobility. The findings suggest that psychological empowerment level is significantly and highly positively associated with SHG participation, a finding that corroborates earlier research studies which highlight the positive role of SHG in improving the level of self-confidence, decision-making power and personal agency, among others (Kabeer, 1999; Mayoux, 2001). In addition, psychological empowerment is found to be an important predictor of economic mobility ($\beta = 0.326$, $t = 5.322$, $p < 0.001$, and $f^2 = 0.076$), meaning that a person's ability to bring about personal economic advancement is enhanced by psychological empowerment (Narayan, 2005). The mediation analysis further validated that psychological

empowerment fully mediated the effect of SHG participation on economic mobility ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 5.141$, $p < 0.001$), thus confirming that empowerment is the pathway by which SHGs positively impact economic mobility.

Multigroup Analysis

Table 7 shows that the Multigroup Analysis (MGA) results support the hypothesis that structural relationships are different for male and female respondents, since there are significant differences in the relationships between the study constructs. For female respondents, Policy and Environmental Factors had the strongest influence on Self-Help Group Participation ($\beta = 0.544$, $t = 8.643$, $p = 0.000$), followed by Social and Cultural Factors ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 3.615$, $p = 0.000$), Institutional Support ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 2.893$, $p = 0.004$), and Capacity Building ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 3.023$, $p = 0.003$). Economic Factors showed a marginally significant effect ($\beta = 0.132$, $t = 1.912$, $p = 0.056$). Among male respondents, Economic Factors exerted a stronger significant influence ($\beta = 0.285$, $t = 5.662$, $p = 0.000$), while Capacity Building ($\beta = 0.216$, $t = 5.754$, $p = 0.000$) and Policy and Environmental Factors ($\beta = 0.389$, $t = 6.945$, $p = 0.000$) also significantly influenced participation. Furthermore, Self-Help Group Participation significantly influenced Psychological Empowerment for both females ($\beta = 0.690$, $t = 15.311$, $p = 0.000$) and males ($\beta = 0.611$, $t = 14.139$, $p = 0.000$). Psychological Empowerment also positively affected Economic Mobility among females ($\beta = 0.326$, $t = 2.457$, $p = 0.014$) and males ($\beta = 0.335$, $t = 4.800$, $p = 0.000$). The relationship of Self-Help Group Participation to Economic Mobility, however, was not significant for females ($\beta = 0.030$, $t = 0.242$, $p = 0.809$) and was only marginally significant for males ($\beta = 0.130$, $t = 1.746$, $p = 0.081$), suggesting that psychological empowerment plays a mediating role. The results overall indicate that there were large gender differences in structural relations among constructs.

Table 7: Multigroup (MGA) Analysis

Construct relationship	Path Coefficient(β)		t value		p value	
	Female)	Male	Female)	Male	Female)	Male
Economic Factors -> Self-Help Group Participation	0.132	0.285	1.912	5.662	0.056	0.000
Institutional _Support -> Self-Help Group Participation	0.171	0.129	2.893	3.444	0.004	0.001
Social and Cultural Factors -> Self-Help Group Participation	0.216	0.154	3.615	3.656	0.000	0.000
Policy and Environmental _Factors -> Self-Help Group Participation	0.544	0.389	8.643	6.945	0.000	0.000
Capacity Building -> Self-Help Group Participation	0.156	0.216	3.023	5.754	0.003	0.000
Self-Help Group Participation -> Economic Mobility	0.030	0.130	0.242	1.746	0.809	0.081
Self-Help Group Participation -> Psychological Empowerment	0.690	0.611	15.311	14.139	0.000	0.000
Psychological Empowerment -> Economic Mobility	0.326	0.335	2.457	4.800	0.014	0.000

4. Discussion

The structural model results show that there are various interacting factors that affect the participation of the Self-Help Group (SHG), which in turn can affect empowerment and economic mobility. Economic factors have positive impact on the participation of SHG, which suggested that people are more likely to join SHG if they think to obtain some tangible economic benefits including access to micro-credit, savings, and income generation. Our results are in line with earlier research that has focused on the importance of microfinance and financial incentives for promoting participation in collective self-help programs (Banerjee et al., 2019; Brody et al., 2017). Besides,

Financial literacy, capacity-building initiatives, and technical assistance by government agencies, NGO or community institutions contribute to increased awareness and capabilities of the members, which further boost engagement (Deininger & Liu, 2019; Sanyal, 2018). But relying heavily on outside organisations could jeopardise local autonomy and ownership in SHGs (Sahu & Singh, 2023).

The findings underscore the significant role of social and cultural dimensions in shaping participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The formation of social capital, trust, reciprocity, and collective identity fosters strong interpersonal relationships and a shared sense of responsibility, thereby enhancing members' engagement in economic activities. These results are consistent with Social Capital Theory, which emphasises the role of networks and interdependencies in facilitating collective action and community development (Putnam, 2000; Agarwal, 2018). Empirical evidence further confirms that social support and community cohesion are critical determinants of the sustainability and effectiveness of women's SHGs in developing economies (Kabeer, 2019). In addition, contextual and institutional factors such as government support, rural livelihood programmes, microfinance initiatives, training, and financial literacy interventions significantly strengthen SHG participation, leadership, and overall efficiency (Ghosh and Vinod, 2017; NRLM, 2021; Tripathi and Jain, 2020).

The mediation analysis further reveals that SHG participation influences economic mobility primarily through psychological empowerment rather than direct financial gains. This indicates that SHGs function more as platforms for enhancing self-confidence, self-efficacy, and decision-making capacity among members, rather than immediately generating monetary benefits (Kabeer, 2019; Brody et al., 2017). Psychologically empowered individuals are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities, financial planning, and risk-taking behaviour, thereby facilitating economic mobility (Sanyal, 2018; Garikipati et al., 2019). These findings strongly support Empowerment Theory, which highlights the centrality of psychological mechanisms in driving socioeconomic development (Zimmerman, 2000; Kabeer, 2019). The results further indicate full mediation, suggesting that SHGs influence economic mobility exclusively through psychological empowerment pathways.

There are moderate gender group differences in the determinants and outcomes of Self-Help Group (SHG) participation, as shown by the Multi-Group Analysis (MGA). Women's economic inclusion is influenced more by policy support and enabling institutional environments as compared to men (Kala & Chaubey, 2024; Kumar & Mishra, 2022; Sahu & Singh, 2023). Social and cultural aspects continue to be relevant for both women and men and highlight the importance of trust, community involvement and local networks in maintaining SHG activities (Deininger & Liu, 2019). Economic motives seem to be relatively stronger for males as compared to females, which may be owing to changing roles of women in rural economic activities (Nair & Tankha, 2021). Additionally, the increase in psychological empowerment among women's SHG members is positively correlated with their involvement in SHG, lending support to the fact that SHG improves women's self-confidence, autonomy, and decision-making power (Brody et al., 2017). The results also draw attention to the importance of psychological empowerment as a key pathway for economic empowerment through SHG participation, thus supporting the capability-based approaches to sustainable development (Kabeer, 2020).

5. Theoretical Contribution

This paper makes a significant contribution to the literature on Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in proposing a comprehensive framework that brings together economic, institutional, socio-cultural, policy, and capacity-building determinants to explain the participation and success of SHGs. This research is different in its coverage of the multiple institutional and socio-environmental ecosystems that affect the participation of SHG members, rather than the economic aspects as was done in earlier studies. As revealed in previous studies, supportive policies and institutional mechanisms were found to positively affect participation in SHGs (Kumar & Mishra, 2022; Sahu & Singh, 2023). Moreover, the findings of the study complement empowerment and capability-building theories that resonate with empowerment-based development concepts, which recognise that empowerment, confidence, and decision-making capability are vital to sustainable development (Kabeer, 2020). Furthermore, the research

confirms the gender and development literature, which has established that the motivation of women to take part in the SHGs is greater compared to that of men, as the women have a higher level of autonomy and self-confidence, while the economic motivation is comparatively strong among men to participate in the SHG (Brody et al., 2017; Nair & Tankha, 2021).

6. Managerial Implications

The findings have significant policy implications for both policymakers and development practitioners and organisations involved in the promotion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Policy and environmental facilitation have an important role, hence the necessity to strengthen institutional support by implementing effective policy frameworks and improving access to financial resources and coordination among public and non-governmental actors. The supportive policy environment has been found to positively affect the poor participation and sustainability of SHG (Kumar & Mishra, 2022). In addition, capacity building efforts, such as financial literacy, skill development, and training programs, are crucial for improving the skills of members and their economic engagement. The findings also highlight the need for psychological empowerment through leadership development, participative decision making and peer support. Beyond this, the use of social capital and community networks can enhance the sense of solidarity and community action among group members (Deininger & Liu, 2019). Lastly, interventions addressing gender still play an important role in promoting inclusive participation and promoting women's empowerment over the long term.

7. Conclusion

This research work is significant in determining the variables and consequences of Self-Help Group participation through the analysis of economic, institutional, socio-cultural, policy and capacity-building factors. The results indicate that a mix of factors, both structural and contextual, will influence participation in SHGs, and supportive policies and favourable environments are important in improving participation and inclusion. The study also shows that SHG involvement has a positive effect on economic outcomes, which is mediated by psychological empowerment. Being part of SHGs can boost self-confidence, self-efficacy and decision-making power of an individual, which in turn encourages him/her to explore and seek economic avenues for betterment. The findings are consistent with the empowerment-based development paradigm suggested by Naila Kabeer (2020), which focuses on the enhancement of capabilities as a means to bring socio-economic development. Furthermore, gender differences reveal that there is more empowerment impact for women and comparatively a higher impact for men on economic motivation. In general, SHGs become significant social institutions that facilitate empowerment, collective action and inclusive economic mobility.

Limitations and future direction of the Study

While this study contributes meaningfully to the understanding of the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in enhancing empowerment and facilitating socio-economic mobility, several limitations should be acknowledged, offering avenues for future research. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences regarding the relationships among the studied variables over time. Future studies may adopt longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic and long-term effects of SHG participation on empowerment outcomes and socio-economic advancement, thereby strengthening causal validity. Second, the empirical investigation is confined to a specific geographical region, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Variations in institutional frameworks, policy environments, and socio-cultural contexts across regions or countries may influence SHG functioning and outcomes differently. Therefore, comparative studies across diverse settings are recommended to enhance external validity and contextual understanding. Third, although psychological empowerment is incorporated as a key mediating construct, other potentially significant mediators and moderators, such as social capital, financial literacy, entrepreneurial orientation, financial inclusion, and digital financial literacy, remain unexplored. Incorporating these variables in future research could provide a more comprehensive

explanation of the mechanisms through which SHGs influence socio-economic outcomes. Finally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce response and social desirability biases. Future research employing qualitative or mixed-method approaches could help capture deeper insights into lived experiences and group dynamics among SHG members.

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