



# TIJSBM

*Techno India Journal of the Strategic Business Mind*

International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

## ARTICLE TITLE

**Mapping the Intellectual Structure of Self-Help Groups and Women Empowerment: A Bibliometric and Thematic Review**

## ARTICLE TYPE

<b>Research Article</b>	<i>Review Article</i>	<i>Case Study</i>	<i>Conceptual Paper</i>	<i>Policy Paper</i>	<i>Short Communication</i>
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## THEMATIC CATEGORY

Category A: Strategy & Leadership | Category B: Technology & Digital Business | Category C: Finance & Economics

Category D: Marketing & Consumer Studies | Category E: Human Capital & Organizations | Category F: Sustainability & ESG

Category G: Entrepreneurship & Emerging Markets | Category H: Operations, Analytics & Supply Chain

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# Mapping the Intellectual Structure of Self-Help Groups and Women Empowerment: A Bibliometric and Thematic Review

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## ABSTRACT

*Women Empowerment has been considered as one of the improvement indicator by almost the developing countries and India is in the topside of the list. India adopted this strategy by cultivation of self-help groups (SHGs) which are mostly dominated by women. There are many studies on socio-economic impact of SHGs participation, but very tiny on intellectual structure of SHGs. In this study, the researcher performed bibliometric analysis and thematic reviews of some number of scholarly literatures on Women's' Empowerment through SHGs involvement. In this study, researchers collected peer-reviewed scholarly articles available at different open-access academic sources. Then, the researchers examined publication trends, dominant research themes and conceptual linkages to cover descriptive bibliometric techniques and qualitative thematic synthesis. After analysis, the researchers found out three major thematic clusters. The first one is the microfinance & livelihood led economic empowerment, second one is the social and psychological empowerment through collective agency and the third one is the institutional linkages which strengthens sustainable development outcomes. The finding exposed a strong emphasis on micro-level impact assessment, with limited attention to longitudinal empowerment, political participation and digital transformations of SHGs. The review has immense potential for empirical and policy-oriented studies on Women-centred development interventions in future by involving the research gap indentified.*

## KEYWORDS

Women Empowerment • Microfinance • Rural Development • Gender Studies • Self-help Groups • Bibliometric Analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

Women Empowerment is the essential for ensuring inclusively and equality for all. It has transformed how individuals consider and discuss in social-economic development. Women Empowerment is the aspect of this and Self-help Groups serve as a means to support women. These groups provide beneficial in areas where women's face unfair treatment and must labour without any safeguards. Self-Help Groups assist in these scenarios by uniting women and providing them with a means to obtain the financial resources they necessitate. Research on microfinance and development socio-economic indicate that Women Empowerment and Self-Help Groups assist individual in saving money, obtaining loans and exploring various methods of earning a livelihood and women to manage their finance effectively (Banarjee *et. al.*,2015). However, empirical evidence considerable heterogeneity in Women Empowerment outcome across regions and socio-institutional contexts, with various studies reporting limited gains beyond short-term economic indicator (Duflo, 2012). These mixed finding have promoted renewed scholarly attention to the institutional, governance and social dimensions through which Self-Help Groups operate, emphasizing that empowerment is not an automatic by-product of group participation by women but contingent process shaped by local norms, state-market linkage and organizational structure (Deininger & Liu, 2013). Despite the quick growth of SHG-centered interventions and an increase in academic work in this area, the literature is still scattered. There is no systematic overview of its intellectual structure and thematic changes thereby necessitating a bibliometric and thematic review to consolidate knowledge identify research gap and guide future empirical inquiry.

## 2. Conceptual Background

Self-help Groups operates women to resources and empowerment, acting as institutional mechanisms that facilitate access and achieve goals, addressing financial inclusion and gender-based limitation within a socio-economic context. Conceptual and Empirical studies emphasis that Self-help Groups extend beyond their role as savings and credit collectives to functional as platforms for social learning, leadership development and collective problem solving, thereby embedding economic participation within broader social and institutional process. The extent to women participating in Self-help Groups are empowered is revealed by the institutional environment in which these groups are embedded, their connections to financial institutions and support from state and non-state actors. Women's Empowerment encompasses not only economic autonomy, social mobility, institutional opportunity and physiological capabilities. Self-help groups plays a significant role at the intersection of these two areas by providing women with greater interconnectivity and overcoming the barriers to collective action presented by weak institutional structures and established socio-economic norms and political dynamics that have the potential to limit the transformational opportunity of Women's Empowerment. As such, Self-help Groups should best be considered as an embedded system of empowerment designed and developed by institutions whose performance will be determined by the internal dynamics of Self-help Groups operate and located in concert with the external financial social and policy system.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study employs a structure bibliometric review design based on a purposively compiled dataset of 139, based on peer-reviewed scholarly articles, books and thesis that explicitly examine that role of Self-help Groups in advancing women's empowerment, with a predominant empirical focus on India. The selected studies presented a variety of methodological approaches such as mixed method like, quantitative impact assessment and qualitative case studies, these were founded and using academic database, institutional repositories and open access journal platform. To support thematic interpretations, improve analytical depth and contextual validity and situate the selected literature in the larger framework of development and gender studies, additional open access scholarly sources were consulted. This analysis combined descriptive bibliometric technique with qualitative thematic synthesis, which adheres to a widely accepted framework for bibliometric and thematic review studies published in social science journal Indexed by Scopus. In this study descriptive indicators were used to examine publication timelines, research focus and methodological patterns across the dataset and the next stage involve inductive thematic coding to identify dominant research clusters, conceptual linkage and underexplored dimensions of SHGs-Led empowerment and after next stage comprehensive analysis of women's empowerment and socio-economic inclusion are institutionally constructed across the entire thematic landscape. This integrative approach enables a systematic mapping of the intellectual structure of the literature while maintaining sensitivity to the multidimensional and institutionally embedded nature of women's empowerment outcomes.

## 4. Bibliometric Research and Thematic Synthesis

In this study, Table 1 summarizes the composition of the bibliometric corpus, highlighting the scope, geometric concentration and methodological diversity of scholarly work on Self-help Groups and Women Empowerment. The dataset comprises 139 peer-review research articles, books and thesis published in between the early 2000 to 2024, reflecting the relatively recent yet rapidly expanding nature of SHGs and Women Empowerment Focused research. The overwhelming emphasis on the Indian context underscores India's central role policy and empirical laboratory for SHG-Led development interventions. The presence of qualitative, quantities and mixed method studies indicate that the field has evolved through multiple analytical traditions, although this diversity has also contributed to fragmented empirical insights rather than cumulative theory building.

**Table1.** Dataset Summary

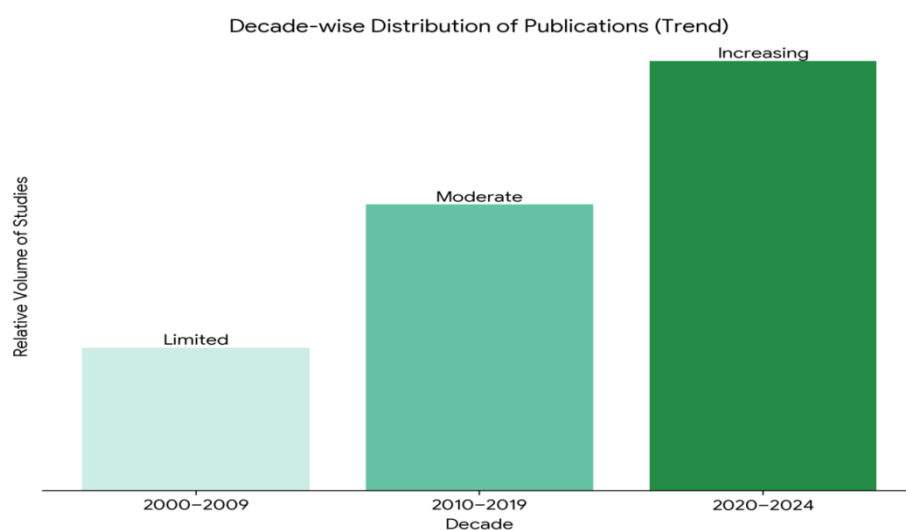
Total unique references :	::	139
Time coverage	::	Early 2000s–2024
Journal articles / reports:	::	93
Books / monographs:	::	26
Book chapters:	::	17
Working papers / reports:	::	3
References with DOI:	::	58.20%
Geographic focus	::	Predominantly India
Research focus	::	SHGs and women’s empowerment
Methodological Approaches	::	Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Method

Table 2, show the temporal evolution of the literature, collectively illustrating a district and non-linear growth of scholarly interest in SHGs throughout the years. The quantity of research on Self-help Groups in between 2000 to 2009 was quite limited. This marked the inception of Self-help Groups, focusing primarily on how providing loans to individual could aid in alleviating poverty. From 2010 to 2019, an increasing number of individual wrote regarding Self-help Groups and Women Empowerment. In this due to Self-help Groups expending and taking actions to assist individuals earning a livelihood. Researcher began to examine how Self-help Groups and Women Empowerment were assisting individual in various ways beyond financial support. From 2020 to 2024, it is evident that individuals believe in Self-help Groups and Women Empowerment plays a crucial role in policy-making and those researchers are quite intrigued by their management, sustainability and collaboration with other entities. This change over time indicates a shift from narrowly defined evaluations to broader, institutionally based interpretations of Self-help Groups and Women Empowerment.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Publication by Decade

Decade	Number of Studies	Dominant Research Focus
2000–2009	Limited	Microfinance and Alleviation of poverty
2010–2019	Moderate	Social and Economic empowerment
2020–2024	Increasing	Organizational Connections and Sustainability

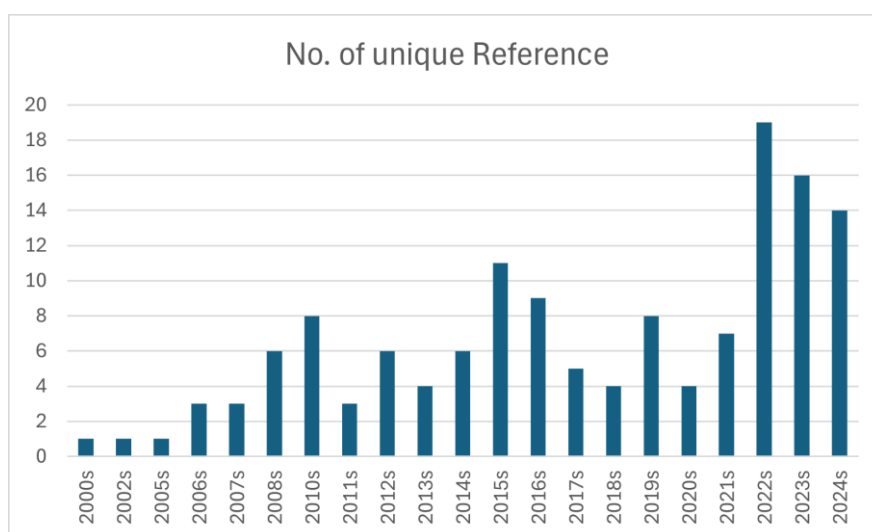
Figure 1, visually emphasis this timeline, depicting not only a rise in publication quantity but also a significant shift in the analytical focus of the discipline. The rising trend in research output indicate the growth of SHGs research from basic program evaluations to more intricate analysis of the women empowerment process situated within social and institutional framework.

**Figure 1.** Decade wise distribution of Publications

This content given outlines the temporal distribution of publication in quantitative terms (Limited, Moderate and Increasing) instead of offering exact numerical figure of every decade. To depict this data as a bar chart, I have assigned these qualitative descriptors to an ordinal scale to illustrate the growth trend outline in Table 2.

The chart shows how the research focus has change over time according to the information you provided. It gives us an idea of what research emphasis and how it has developed. The research emphasis is what we are looking, at here. The chart helps us understand its development. In 2000-2009, studies on Microcredit were still in the early stage, people were mainly focusing on Microcredit and it's trying to help those in poverty. Then 2010-2019, in this period researcher studies more than financial help, women were started to financial included and also socio-economic empowerment through SHGs. After 2020-2024, most recent period shows highest engagement with a shift towards institutional linkage and sustainability.

Decade		No. of unique Reference
2000s	::	1
2002s	::	1
2005s	::	1
2006s	::	3
2007s	::	3
2008s	::	6
2010s	::	8
2011s	::	3
2012s	::	6
2013s	::	4
2014s	::	6
2015s	::	11
2016s	::	9
2017s	::	5
2018s	::	4
2019s	::	8
2020s	::	4
2021s	::	7
2022s	::	19
2023s	::	16
2024s	::	14



**Figure 2.** Decade wise distribution of References

The thematic distribution presented in Table 3 and Figure 3 shows a clear predominance of studies that focus on socio-economic empowerment within the Self-help Groups and Women Empowerment literature, whereas social and institutional dimensions remain comparatively less integrated both within and across thematic categories. Existing research continues to privilege measurable financial outcomes, such as income generation, savings behaviour and asset ownership, thereby reinforcing the treatment of economic participation as the primary proxy for empowerment. In the gap of social and psychological aspects, including agency, self-confidence, mobility and participation in the household and community decision-making, received secondary attention and there are often examined as derivative outcomes rather than as core analytical constructs. Institutional dimensions, encompassing linkages with the formal banking system, government welfare schemes and local governance structure, occupy a more peripheral position and frequently framed as contextual enablers rather than as central determinants of empowerment processes. An examination of thematic integration further indicates that most studies address these dimensions in isolation, with limited analytical efforts to connect economic, social and institutional pathways within a unified framework. This fragmented thematic structure suggests that, despite growing recognition of women’s empowerment as a multidimensional concept, the literature has yet to fully operationally integrate analytical model capable of capturing the dynamic and interdependent nature of women’s empowerment through Self-help Groups.

**Table 3.** Primary Thematic Distribution

Thematic Cluster	Core Analytical Emphasis
Economic Empowerment	Income Generation, Saving Assets Ownership, Livelihood Improvement.
Social Empowerment	Agency, Confidence, Participation, Community Engagement, Social Network.
Institutional Empowerment	Access to Bank, State Programs, Governance, Policy Support, Institutional Facilitation.
Self-help Groups	Group Formation, Peer Support, Collective Action, Capacity Building, Micro Savings.
Women Empowerment	Decision Making Power, Autonomy, Self-Confidence, Social Recognition.
Rural Development	Rural Livelihoods, Infrastructure Access, Agriculture Productivity, Community Project.
Socio-Economic Empowerment	Combined Social and Economic Status, Income Stability, Education, Healthcare Projects.
Microfinance	Credit Access, Loans, Repayment Behavior, Financial Literacy, Entrepreneurship.
Financial Inclusion	Bank Account Ownership, Digital Payments, Savings Participation, Formal Finance Access.
Gender Equality	Equal Rights, Opportunities, Access to Resources, Elimination of Gender-Based Disparities.
Women Entrepreneurs	Business Skills, Start-ups, Market Access, Income Generation, Leadership.
Social Empowerment	Participation of Decision Making, Collective Voice, Community Recognition.
Sustainable Development	Environmental Awareness, Long-term Economic Viability, Inclusive Growth.
Gender Studies	Analysis of Gender Norms, Roles, inequalities, Policy Implications.
Feminist Research	Critical Examination of Patriarchy, Social Structures, Women’s Lived Experiences.
Women’s Voice and Agency	Decision Making in Household, Self-Expression, Advocacy, Negotiation Skills.
Feminist Economics	Gendered Analysis of Labor, Income, Production, Consumption, Policy Impact.

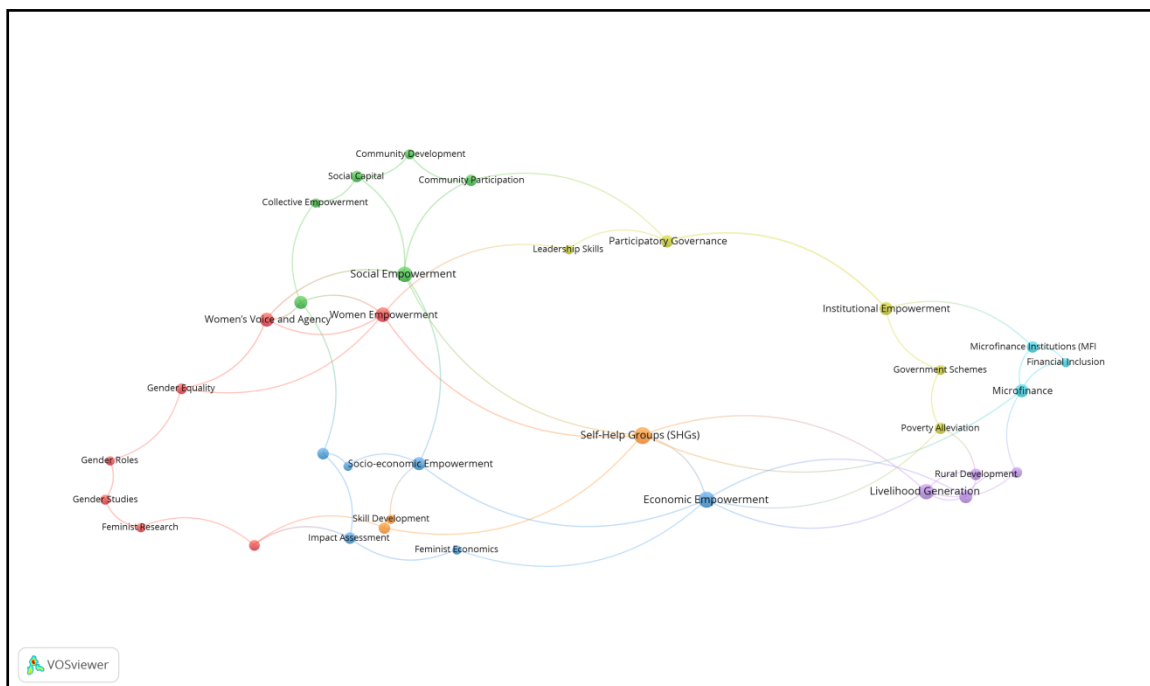
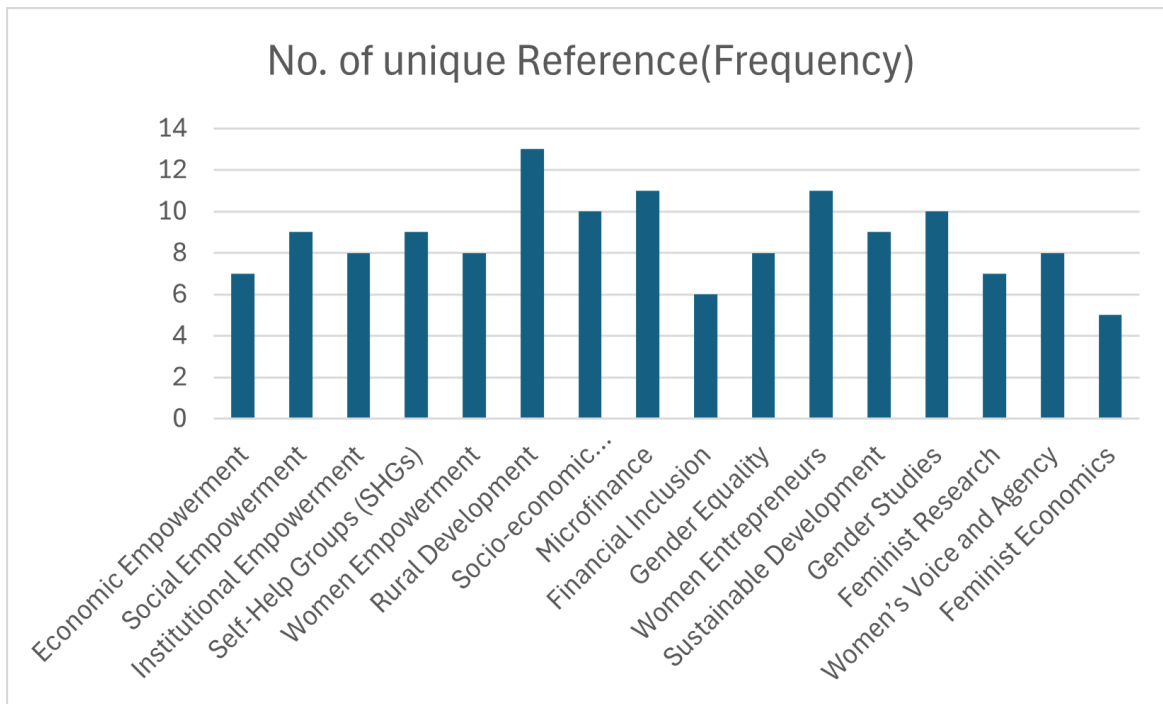


Figure3

**Table 4. Primary Thematic Distribution**

Primary Thematic Distribution	No. of unique Reference ( <b>Frequency</b> )
Economic Empowerment	7
Social Empowerment	9
Institutional Empowerment	8
Self-Help Groups (SHGs)	9
Women Empowerment	8
Rural Development	13
Socio-economic Empowerment	10
Microfinance	11
Financial Inclusion	6
Gender Equality	8
Women Entrepreneurs	11
Sustainable Development	9
Gender Studies	10
Feminist Research	7
Women's Voice and Agency	8
Feminist Economics	5



**Figure 4.** Primary Thematic Distribution

Based on the Primary Thematic Distribution (Table 4) and the accompanying textual synthesis, I have created a chart that visualized the three dominants cluster. Since the text describe a hierarchy of focus, this chart utilised and ordinal scale to represent their relative dominance in the literature, annotated with their core analytical emphasis.

## 5. Discussion: Implication for Empirical Research

This study implemented about Self-help Groups and Women's Empowerment and it find lots of research only talk about these groups affect women like financial inclusion, saving and money management for own, becoming independent is not just about money. It's about women being able to make their decision wanting more for them being able to take action and having better relationship with others. Self-help Groups play a role in this. They help women in ways not just with money also Self-help Groups helps women change and become more independent, over time. Women's do not make decision on their own, their choice are affected by the things they have to do at home and the people around them in their community. This article shows that we should think of women's empowerment, as something that happens over time not something that happens once. At this time women's get a work and make more money, it does not just change their material lives, it also change about their skill and they participate in decision that affect their community. Most of the time studies women's empowerment happens, they learn from each other and work together and also talk to each other every day in their Self-help Groups, in these groups all the women support each other. This research on women empowerment of women's groups are create their connection with banks, government programmes and local institution through Self-help Groups and these connection really helps for better work and government support. The results shows that should not just look economic benefits but understand Self-help Groups are able to make real and lasting changes, in women's lives. Finally, bibliometric analysis points to several emerging but under research areas such as digital financial inclusion, Self-help Groups federations and women's political empowerment at the local level that call for theoretically grounded empirical studies integrating insights from institutional economic and gender theory to enhance to policy relevance of Self-help Groups-led development initiatives.

## 6. Conclusion

The present research article set out to bring together and interpret the growing body of research on Self-help groups and Women's Empowerment by examining its intellectual orientation and dominant thematic patterns. By analysing a range of scholarly sources through bibliometric and thematic techniques, this research study shows that academic attention to Self-help Group based development initiatives has increased noticeably during past two decades. The expansion largely reflects the recognition of Self-help groups as an important institutional approach for improving rural livelihoods and advancing gender inclusive development, particularly within the Indian policy environment. Much of the existing research has concentrated on measurable economic outcomes such as income generation, savings practices, access to credit and financial inclusion. On the other hand, the broader synthesis indicates that the significance of Self-help groups cannot be limited to economic advancement alone. Participation in these groups often creates opportunities for mutual learning, collective support and gradual confidence building, which may influence women's ability to participate more actively in household and community decision making. At the same time, the research article suggests that many studies address economic, social and institutional aspects of empowerment separately rather than examining their interconnected nature. Several emerging area including digital financial inclusion, Self-help Groups federations, governance structures and women's grassroots political participation remain relatively underexplored. Future research that adopts longitudinal perspectives and mixed method approaches may therefore offer deeper insights based on Self-help groups and initiative contribute to more sustainable and inclusive forms of Women's Empowerment.

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