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EMPOWERMENT OF BEHAVIORAL COMPETENCY OF WOMEN IN KERALA- A KUDUMBASHREE MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women and their participation in the development process has been considered as an essential feature of development of a nation. In India, women especially from the rural parts of the country suffer from being economically and socially suppressed by the male dominated society. Their thoughts and opinions are never considered by anyone in the society. Even they don't have the right to take decision on matters related with their future. It is presumed that real nation development is possible only if the men and women work in equal terms. The Kudumbashree is a real example for the empowerment of women both in social as well as economic status. The Kudumbashree project first started in Kerala in the year 1998. The ultimate objective of the Kudumbashree scheme is to improve the standard of living of poor rural women by setting up micro-credit and productive enterprises. It is started as a joint programme of the Government of Kerala and NABARD implemented through Community Development Societies of Poor Women, serving as the community wing of Local Governments. The study mainly focuses on the empowerment of behavioral competency of rural women through Kudumbashree units. It shows that the majority of economically backward rural women people are working in Kudumbashree units and they got a notable level of improvement in various behavioral competencies. The Kudumbashree in Kerala is real model to follow for the rest of the states in India to empower the rural women.

Keywords: Behavioral Competency; Women Empowerment; Rural Women; Micro Credit Enterprises

INTRODUCTION

“In order to awaken the people, it is the woman who has to be awakened first. Once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves, the country moves and thus we build the India tomorrow” Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

The above quoting of our first Prime Minister rightly says the importance of women empowerment in a states development process. The social status of women is a reliable indicator of the development of the society. In India, women especially from the rural parts of the country suffer from being economically and socially suppressed by the male dominated society. They were not able to prove their potential and skill. Even right to education is yet a dream to her. Their thoughts and opinions are never considered by anyone in the society. Even they don't have the right to take decision on matters related with their future.

To overcome and counter these situations, women need to alter their self-image and therefore social image. To give reputation, status to rural women and to enable society to come in contact with poor rural women they must get organized in groups. The arrangement of Self Help Groups (SHG) is a promising tool and step for promoting the empowerment of social status of women in rural areas.

Kudumbashree, Literal meaning is prosperity (shree) of family (Kudumbam), in Malayalam, the local language spoken in Kerala. Kudumbashree is a female-oriented, community-based, poverty reduction

project of Government of Kerala. It is an innovative programme introduced for the eradication of absolute poverty in ten years through concerted community action under the supervision of local self-governments. The purpose of the mission is to ensure that the women should no longer remain as passive recipients of public assistance, but active leaders in women-involved development initiatives. Kudumbashree movement was launched by former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee at a function chaired by the then Local Administration Minister Paloli Mohammed Kutty at Kottakkunnu in Malappuram on May 17, 1998. The programme has 41 lakhs members and covers more than 50% of the households in Kerala. It has built around three vital components, micro credit, entrepreneurship and empowerment. The aim of the Kudumbashree scheme is to, develop the behavioural competencies and improve the standard of living of poor women in rural areas by setting up micro-credit and productive enterprises. It is a community based self-help initiative involving poor women. Kudumbashree was conceived as a joint programme of the Government of Kerala and NABARD implemented through Community Development Societies (CDSs) of Poor Women, serving as the community wing of Local Governments. The aim of the Kudumbashree scheme is to empower women as a strategy for Poverty Eradication. The Kudumbashree Community based organizations are acting as social safety nets, increasing access to entitlements and providing avenues for political participation.

There are two distinguishing characteristics to Kudumbashree which set it apart from the usual SHG model of empowerment. These are

The universality of reach – from its very inception Kudumbashree has attempted to bring every poor woman in the state within its fold, as a consequence of which today Kudumbashree is present in every village panchayat and municipality, and in nearly every ward, colony and hamlet. The sheer spread is mind boggling, and it is only because the local community of women drive the system that it has managed to persevere.

The scope of community interface in local governance – the functioning of Kudumbashree is tied up to the development initiatives of the local government be it for social infrastructure, welfare or right based interventions or for employment generation. From food security to health insurance, from housing to enterprise development, from the national wage employment programme to the jagratha samiti, every development experience depends on Kudumbashree to provide the community interface.

The following are the community structures suggested for the rural side:

- Kudumbashree Ayalkoottam (NHG)
- Kudumbashree Ward Samithy (ADS)
- Kudumbashree Panchayat Samithy (CDS)

41 lakh poor families brought under the community based organisations (CBOs) consisting of 2.61 lakh Neighbourhood Groups (NHG), 19,773 Area Development Societies (ADSs) and 1,072 Community Development Societies (CDSs) - rural urban.

The paradigm shift in the approach is that any woman who is residing in the Grama Panchayat can become a member of the Kudumbashree Ayalkoottam irrespective of whether she is in a below poverty line (BPL) family. Since this aspect gives an opening for the above poverty line (APL) families to enter into the community structures envisaged by Kudumbashree, it is further ensured that majority of the office bearers should belong to BPL families. These structures give added importance to women empowerment both social and economic.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to assess whether there is any significant change in empowerment of Behavioural Competency of rural women in Kerala through Kudumbashree.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. K Venugopalan (2014) reveals that SHGs enhance equality of status of women as participants, decision makers and beneficiaries in the democratic economic, social and cultural spheres of life. SHGs also encourage women to take active part in socio-economic progress of our nation. Credit needs of the rural women are fulfilled totally through the self-help groups. Women workers should give due consideration for developing self confidence and knowledge about intellectual rights. Each unit of Kudumbasree must give attention for the empowerment of members.

Kenneth Kalyani, Seena P.C (2012) reveals that economic development is the base for other development. Collective effort has been recognized as tenets of women empowerment. Through women empowerment leads to sustainable social development. Economic development of women leads to better living status in the family, educational, nutritional, and the health needs of the children were well satisfied. Economic independence through Kudumbasree improved the social participation of its members and the Kudumbashree NHG movement is supporting for social empowerment of poor women flock.

Minimol M. C and Makesh K. G (2012) in their study identified that Intellectual empowerment is considered more important, or at least equally important to social, economic or financial empowerment. The concept of personal empowerment often fails to encompass intellectual empowerment. The objective intended to be achieved is that the members become more capacitated to think and act better from blunt in thinking to sharp; and from thick in action to fine. According to them the concept of SHGs for rural women empowerment has not yet run its full course in attaining its objective.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF DATA

The influence of Kudumbashree on the behavioural competencies of women is assessed by the field surveys and personal interviews. Statistical evidences are also drawn from the sources available with the Department of Economics and Statistics and the Project Directorate of State Poverty Eradication Mission of the Government of Kerala. Micro-units, under the scheme are surveyed and examined for arriving at conclusions. The study is mainly based on primary data, and the secondary data is used to supplement and support the primary data. A field survey was carried out covering rural areas.

Six micro units of Kudumbashree of Malappuram district namely, 1.Pratheeksha, 2.Anugraha, 3.Navodaya, 4.Sampoorna, 5.Jwala, 6.Thanima are selected by random sampling method and members of the selected units are the respondents. Each unit consists of 20 members. So a total of 120 members of 6 units are taken as sample respondents for the purpose of study.

The following are the variables used for measuring the empowerment of behavioural competency of women in Kerala

1. Knowledge and awareness
2. Decision making skill
3. Problem solving skill
4. Communication skill
5. Leadership skill
6. Self confidence
7. Social responsibility
8. Social status
9. Overall personality

Scaling technique is used to measure the variables related with level of improvement on a three point scale with a weightage of three, two and one for Highly Improved, Fairly improved and Not improved.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The responses of the respondents from six Kudumbashree units were analyzed based on various demographic segments like their age, income, education and occupation.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of Respondents

Details		No. of	Percentage
Age	Response category	Respondents	(Rounded off)
	20- 30	43	36
	30- 40	46	38
	>40	31	26
Total		120	100
Income	Below 5000	21	18
	5000- 7499	47	39
	7500- 10000	35	29
	>10000	17	14
Total		120	100
Education	LP/UP	12	10
	High School	59	49
	Plus Two	32	27
	>Plus Two	17	14
Total		120	100
Occupation	Coolie	66	55
	Semi skilled labor	15	13
	Others	5	4
	No Job	34	28
Total		120	100

Table 1 shows that out of the total 120 respondents from the six Kudumbashree units, when considering the age wise study, reveals that 36 percent are comes under the 20-30 age category, 38 percent are comes under 30- 40 and 26 percent are from above 40 age category. It shows that the rural women in Kerala are actively participating in Kudumbashree activities without much difference in their age level.

The income wise study about the respondents' shows that majority of women engaged in Kudumbashree units are low income group people. Only 14 percent of women have a monthly income of 10000 or more. Most of the respondents, 39 percent, were comes under the income range of 5000-7499.

The education wise study about the respondent's reveals that 10 percent have only primary education, 49 percent have high school level education, 27 percent have plus two and only 14 percent are above plus two qualified. So it shows that the majority of women working in Kudumbashree units have only basic educational qualification. The level of education and development of behavioural competency are directly related. Irrespective of the level of education, how Kudumbashree units helps the women in developing their behavioural competency will be checked in the next analysis table.

Finally the Occupation wise study shows that out of total 120 respondents, majority are either coolie (55percent) or not having any job (28 percent). So it shows that women are considering Kudumbashree units as their additional job and income earning opportunity.

Table 2. Level of improvement of the respondent's behavioural competency

Sl. No.	Behavioural Competency	Highly Improved	%	Fairly Improved	%	Not improved	%	Total Respondents	Total %
1	Knowledge and awareness	62	52	45	37	13	11	120	100
2	Decision making	34	28	59	49	27	23	120	100
3	Problem solving	39	32	61	51	20	17	120	100
4	Communication	35	29	70	58	15	13	120	100
5	Leadership skill	21	18	65	54	34	28	120	100
6	Self confidence	67	56	41	34	12	10	120	100
7	Social responsibility	29	24	69	58	22	18	120	100
8	Social status	40	33	75	63	5	4	120	100
9	Overall personality	45	37	75	63	0	0	120	100

Table 2 reveals that, while considering the level of improvement of Behavioural Competency of respondents, the self-confidence (69%), and the Knowledge and awareness (62%) have highly improved because of the various Kudumbashree activities. The Kudumbashree units have influenced a lot in the social status and overall personality of the members. 75% of the respondents were feeling that they got a fairly improved personality and status in the society due to the Kudumbashree projects. The study also shows that the respondents communication skill (70%), their responsibility in the society (69%), ability to lead the team and to take initiation (65%), ability to understand and solve the problems (61%), and decision making skill in various situations (59%) have fairly improved. From the table 2, it should be noted that none of the respondents have the feel that there isn't any improvement in their overall personality through the Kudumbashree activities.

CONCLUSION

The study about the empowerment of behavioural competency of women through Kudumbashree has provided an insight on women empowerment acquired by the members of various Kudumbashree units after joining in the Kudumbashree. Majority of the members of Kudumbashree units are women workers who are working on a daily wages system. The analysis of the survey data reveals that the behavior competencies of the respondents were improved either highly of fairly. Self confidence and Knowledge and awareness are highly improved and other behavioral competencies comes under study shows a fairly and considerable improvement. The leadership quality and decision making skill of the members need to be give more focus. To conclude we can say that the Kudumbashree units are playing a vital role in the empowerment of behavioral competency of women in Kerala and it is real model for the rest of the nation to follow in the field of women empowerment.

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