The Effects of Economic Self-Help Group Programs on Women’s Empowerment: A Systematic Review

Carinne Brody, Thomas De Hoop, Martina Vojtkova, Megan Dunbar, Padmini Murthy, Shari Dworkin
Overview Workshop

- What is a self-help group?
- What is a systematic review?
- What are the strengths and limitations of systematic reviews?
- What makes this systematic review different?
- Results of Quantitative Analysis
- Results of Qualitative Analysis
- Synthesis
- Reflection
Female participants come together
Receive “Economic Intervention”
Collective Finance: Saving or Credit.
Enterprise or Livelihoods Intervention: Business Training.
Evaluation Questions

1. What is the impact of women’s economic self-help groups on individual empowerment in low and middle-income countries?

2. What are the perspectives of female participants on factors determining their participation in, and benefits from, economic self-help groups?
Empowerment Components

- **Economic:**
  - E.g. Financial decision-making, paid employment, savings accumulation

- **Social**
  - E.g. Freedom of movement, family size decision making, age at marriage

- **Political**
  - E.g. Political participation

- **Psychological**
  - E.g. Feelings of autonomy, confidence, self-sufficiency, depression
What is a Systematic Review?

- Systematic critical appraisal of literature
- Synthesis of literature (Waddington et al., 2012)
  - Impact of self-help groups
  - Perspectives of female self-help group members
Inclusion Randomized Controlled Trials, Quasi-Experimental Evaluations, and Multivariate Regression
Innovation: Inclusion Qualitative Studies

Systematic reviews that only include quantitative evidence can be considered too rigid, failing to address other important questions, such as why an intervention does not work (Snilstveit, Oliver, & Vojtkova, 2012)

- In-Depth Interviews
- Ethnography
- Focus-Groups
Number of Included Studies

23 Quantitative Studies
8 Qualitative Studies
Risk of Bias Assessment Quantitative

- Selection Bias
- Performance Bias: Risk of Spillovers
- Outcome and Analysis Reporting Bias
- Other Biases
# Risk of Bias Assessment Quantitative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias Category</th>
<th>Low Risk</th>
<th>Medium Risk</th>
<th>High Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection bias and confounding</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance bias</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome and analysis reporting biases</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other biases</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

- **Low risk of bias**
- **Medium risk of bias**
- **High risk of bias**
### Meta-Analysis Economic Empowerment RCTs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>ES (95% CI)</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banerjee et al., 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03 (-0.02, 0.09)</td>
<td>42.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desai and Joshi, 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.28 (0.12, 0.45)</td>
<td>33.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherman, 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.30 (-0.13, 0.72)</td>
<td>14.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, 2009 + Pronyk, 2006</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.45 (-0.16, 1.06)</td>
<td>8.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (I-squared = 71.1%, p = 0.016)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.19 (-0.01, 0.40)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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**NOTE:** Weights are from random effects analysis.

Overall (I-squared = 71.1%, p = 0.016) 0.19 (-0.01, 0.40)
Meta-Analysis Economic Empowerment Low and Medium Risk of Selection Bias

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<tr>
<td>De Hoop et al., 2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03 (-0.21, 0.27)</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.28 (0.12, 0.45)</td>
<td>18.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pitt, 2006</td>
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<td>4.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall (I-squared = 56.4%, p = 0.043)</td>
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<td>0.13 (0.03, 0.22)</td>
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Overall (I-squared = 56.4%, p = 0.043)
### Meta-Analysis Social Empowerment RCTs

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<tr>
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<td>-0.10 (-1.23, 1.03)</td>
<td>2.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desai and Tarozzi, 2011, Oromia</td>
<td>0.01 (-0.87, 0.88)</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desai and Joshi, 2012</td>
<td>0.45 (0.25, 0.66)</td>
<td>81.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, 2009 + Pronyk, 2006</td>
<td>0.44 (-0.11, 0.98)</td>
<td>11.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (I-squared = 0.0%, p = 0.619)</td>
<td>0.42 (0.23, 0.60)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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NOTE: Weights are from random effects analysis

Overall (I-squared = 0.0%, p = 0.619) 0.42 (0.23, 0.60)
Meta-Analysis Social Empowerment Low and Medium Risk of Selection Bias

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<tr>
<td>Kim, 2009 + Pronyk, 2006</td>
<td>0.44 (-0.11, 0.98)</td>
<td>8.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (I-squared = 55.3%, p = 0.048)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.03, 0.38)</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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NOTE: Weights are from random effects analysis.

0.20 (0.03, 0.38)
Interpretation of meta-analysis:

- Effect on economic empowerment: 4.9 percentage point
- Effect on social empowerment: 6.4 percentage point
Additional Interesting Findings:

- Effect is stronger for self-help groups with a training component
- The effects on social empowerment appear to be downward biased for studies with a high risk of spillovers
Example: Psychological Empowerment

**Speaking Freely:** women report feeling more capable of speaking in front of others

“One of the things I have learned is to be able to speak in front of a group of 5 people without shivering.” (Kumari)

“We participate in discussions in our family now and they listen to us.” (Mathrani)
Qualitative Findings: Characteristics that Improve Women’s perceptions about Self-Help Groups

- Access to Training
- Self-Help Groups of 10-20 members
- Strong Group Leadership
Qualitative Findings: Characteristics that Impede Access to Self-Help Groups

- Poverty
- No permission from other household members
Revised Theory of Change: Women’s Self-Help Groups

Introduction
Women’s Self-Help Group

Women become members of self-help group

Women members start saving

Exposure to Group Support

Saving serves as collateral to get access to credit

Women receive micro-credit

Ability to make meaningful life choices increases

Husband and mother-in-law approve participation

Knowledge about and time for participation
Women’s Self-Help Groups: Unintended Consequences

- Exposure to Group Support
- Women’s autonomy increases
- Women’s empowerment improves
  - No backlash from the community
  - No problems with internalized psychological rules
- Women’s Subjective Well-Being Increases
Systematic Review: Policy Questions

• Should we scale the self-help group program?
• How should we scale the self-help group program?
• Under which circumstances should we scale the self-help group program?
Self-Help Groups have small but positive effects on economic and social empowerment. There is considerable heterogeneity in the effect size. Self-Help Groups appear to be more effective and are perceived more positively when they include a training component.

Key Lessons

- Scaling of Self-Help Groups depends on cost-effectiveness and other outcome measures.
- Self-Help Groups may be improved by a stronger emphasis on training.
- The findings are applicable to South Asia but extrapolation to the rest of the world is hard.
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## Odds Ratio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Failure</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment Group</td>
<td>$a$</td>
<td>$b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>$c$</td>
<td>$d$</td>
</tr>
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Odds Ratio ($OR$) is given by:

$$OR\ = \ \frac{a/b}{c/d}$$

This represents the ratio of odds of success in the intervention group relative to odds of success in the comparison group.
Standardized Mean Difference

\[ SMD = \frac{Y_t - Y_c}{S_p} \]

where

- Uses the pooled standard deviation (some cases use control group standard deviation)