The idea for the present research took root during meetings of a Task Force on the health of young women set up by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), New Delhi. Discussions held in the meetings highlighted the under-utilization of health services by women and the dangerous consequences of the neglect of young women's health. During one such discussion a member of the group (who has guided the present study) brought to the fore the possibility of the woman's reluctance to seek health care for herself on account of the low importance attached to herself, which was probably a reflection of her own poor self-image. Simultaneously, the burgeoning literature pertaining to developmental programs for women was beginning to reveal women's self-worth or self-esteem as a critical element of development. Readings and reflection on this phenomenon enabled the guide and the researcher to evolve a conceptual framework comprising certain salient factors involved in women's development or empowerment. The framework was widely discussed with different scholars from the fields of development, psychology, health, and human development, both, prior to the onset of the study as well as during the actual process of the research.

One particular dimension that stimulated animated discussion from most scholars was the very concept of women's self-esteem and the problems of measuring the same. The questions that came to the fore repeatedly were: What is self-esteem? What are the
sources of self-esteem? How does it develop and operate in the Indian context? Is it really possible to assess such a dynamic concept? Embarking on the study of self-esteem thus appeared to resemble the opening of the proverbial "Pandora's box", especially the process of assessing the concept. Being a complex and dynamic construct, self-esteem is difficult to comprehend and measure. Furthermore, as aptly stated by a scholar, "Good measures take days, even years to develop". Keeping this dictum in mind, the researcher acknowledges that although the Self-Esteem Scale for Women (SESW) developed for the present study meets with the psychometric considerations of reliability and validity, the tool is by no means a final "fool-proof" measure of women's self-esteem. Consequently, attempts at further validation of the SESW are already underway.

A preliminary attempt at re-validation has been undertaken as part of the IDRC-HDFS Research Network (1993). Two studies were conducted with the aim to: (a) apply the SESW and establish its validity in three different settings, namely, urban, rural, and tribal, and (b) if necessary, develop an alternate measure to assess self-esteem in different sociocultural settings.

The results of the two studies provided substantive support to the cross-validation of the SESW and offered insight into the sources or antecedents of the development of self-esteem in women. The researches also indicated the need to develop an
alternate form of the tool, such as a semi-projective measure, that would elicit responses from individuals who are "non-psychologized" (D. Sinha, personal communication, November 19, 1993).

It is important to reiterate here that although by virtue of its vitality and complexity, the concept of self-esteem tends to evoke maximum interest, each of the other variables included in the study merit considerable attention, especially from the point of view of women's empowerment. Specifically, all the variables included in the study constitute the essence of a woman's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors as they pertain to empowerment. Furthermore, from the point of view of human development, women's manifestation and interpretation of each variable and the emerging pattern of linkages amongst them is likely to yield considerable insight into the Indian woman's psyche - a dimension that merits discerning analysis.