CHAPTER III
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CHAPTER 111
OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

I. Objectives

i. To assess the role of Self-Help Groups in empowering rural women to take independent decisions;

ii. to assess the level of women's autonomy and its socio-economic and demographic determinants both among the members and non-members of SHG;

iii. to assess the influence of women's autonomy on their fertility behaviour and family planning adoption in rural areas;

iv. to assess the differentials in fertility and family planning adoption among the members and non-members of SHG; and

v. to suggest suitable strategies to improve women's autonomy for a sustainable development with reduced fertility and slowing population growth in India.

11. Hypothesis

i. Members of women in Self-Help Group are likely to have more autonomy than non-members.

ii. Increase in the level of exposure to mass media increases the level of autonomy.

iii. Increase in the level of education increases the level of autonomy.

iv. Women who have high level of autonomy are more likely to delay their first birth than those who have low level of autonomy.

v. Women who have high level of autonomy are more likely to have longer birth intervals (24 months or more) than those who have low level of autonomy.
vi. Women who have high level of autonomy are more likely to have less number of children than those who have low level of autonomy.

vii. Women who have high level of autonomy are less likely to have sex preferences (gender composition) than those who have low level of autonomy.

viii. Women who have high level of autonomy are more likely to take independent decisions on fertility and family planning.

ix. Women who have high level of autonomy are more likely to adopt family planning than those who have low level of autonomy.

x. Women who have high level of autonomy are more likely to discuss about family planning and family size with their husband than those who have low level of autonomy.

111. Methodology

3.1 Sample design

The data for the present study were collected mainly through personal interviews with married women aged 15-29 years with at least one living child at the time of interview in three different districts of Tamil Nadu. The districts were selected based on the gender development index published in the Tamil Nadu Human Development Report 2001. In the first stage, the districts in Tamil Nadu were classified into three groups as high, medium and low according to the level of gender development index. (The classification of districts according to Gender Development Index (GDP) are given in Annexure-I). In the next stage, one district was selected at random from each of the low, medium and high group of districts. The districts selected for the study are; 1. Kancheepuram representing high level of gender development, 2. Thiruchirapalli representing medium and 3. Villupuram representing low level of gender development.
After the selection of districts, 4 villages were selected based on their distance from the district Head Quarters. In each of the selected villages, all married women in the age group of 15 - 29 years and having at least one living child were listed out from the records and registers maintained by the Anganwadi Workers. From the list, 50 members and 50 non-members of SHG were selected using systematic random sampling procedure. Thus a total of 200 members and 200 non-members were selected from each district. The total sample consisted of 600 members and 600 non-members of SHG from the three selected districts of Tamil Nadu.

All the selected women were interviewed by the researcher meeting them in their place of residence. Besides the data collection through personal interview, one focus group discussion (FGDs) was organized separately for members and non-members in each of the selected districts. Thus, a total of three FGDs were conducted separately for members and non-members. The FGDs were organized in the evening hours in a common place free from disturbance and distractions. Each FGD took place for nearly two hours and 10-14 participants had participated in each of the FGDs.

3.2 Data collection

An interview schedule was developed using simple and short questions so that the women could answer the questions without any difficulty in understanding them. The interview schedule was pre-tested and finalized. The finalized interview schedule covered a range of subjects which included the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents, their fertility behaviour, family planning knowledge and adoption, and eight different measures of women's autonomy. The data collection work was carried out during the period from May to October 2005.
3.3 Data analysis

The analysis of data was carried out using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Both univariate and multivariate analysis were carried out to assess the level of women's autonomy and the socio-economic and demographic determinants of women's autonomy both among the members and non-members of SHG. In the second stage, the fertility behaviour of women was assessed based on the number of children ever born, age at first birth, age at last birth, birth interval and sex composition of children. The influence of women's autonomy on their fertility behaviour, family planning knowledge and use of contraception was also assessed in this study. The statistics used in the analysis of data were mean, standard deviation, analysis of variance and chi-square.

IV Variables

4.1 Dependent-variable

1. Women’s autonomy
2. Fertility behaviour (Age at first birth, birth interval, number of children ever born, sex composition of children).
3. Family Planning (knowledge and adoption)

Each of the dependent variables was considered individually while doing the analysis.

4.2 Independent variable

1. Socio-economic characteristics - Education of respondent, education of husband, religion, community, involvement in money earning job, family income, standard of living and type of family.
2. Demographic characteristics - Age, age at marriage, husband-wife age difference and number of children.
3. Marital characteristics - Type of marriage, consanguineous type, kind of marriage, inter-caste / inter-religious marriage.

4. Reproductive characteristics - Age at first birth, age at last birth, fertility status, reproductive span and number of living children.

5. Family Planning characteristics - Knowledge about contraception, adoption status, age at adoption and number of children at the time of adoption,

6. Housing characteristics - Type of house, ownership of house, toilet facilities, source of drinking water and electricity facility.

7. Exposure to mass media - Listening to radio, watching television, going to movies, reading newspapers / magazines.

8. Women's autonomy (used only for the dependent variables 2 and 3)

4.3 Women's autonomy variables

In this study, the following eight specific measures of autonomy were considered.

4.3.1 Sex-segregated interaction

The first measure of autonomy is an eight point scale concerned with women's sex-segregated interaction. It is based on questions on whether women had been denied / deprived of certain basic rights such as taking meals along with other male members, present in the same room while there are other male members in the room, accompanying husband for functions, getting adequate nutritious food as that of other male members, getting help from husband for household work, getting equal quality and quantity of food and engaging relatives / friends at home in the absence of husband.
4.3.2 Freedom of movement

The second autonomy measure is a 13 point scale measuring women's freedom of movement. It is based on questions about whether women can go for shopping alone, go to shopping with friends / neighbours, go to movie alone, go to parties / attend village function and community function alone, visit friends' home alone, visit parents' / relatives' house alone, go to hospital, temple, hotel and go out of village / town alone and return to home late in the evening.

4.3.3 Freedom to participate in social and political activities

The third set of autonomy variable is a 14 point scale based on questions asking women whether they had freedom to participate in various social and political activities such as taking part in women's group activities, election activities, panchayat activities and community welfare, interact with men and boys and membership in local, social and political institution.

4.3.4 Financial management

The fourth set of autonomy variable is a three point scale concerned with women's ability to maintain family income, control over jewels and maintaining family property.

4.3.5 Household decisions

The fifth set of autonomy variable is an 11 point scale concerned with women's autonomy on household decisions. It is measured based on questions asking women whether they were able to take decision on household matters such as purchase of household items, purchase of dress, purchase of property / jewels, lending / borrowing, preparation of household budget, children's education, children's marriage, making important family decisions, performing / attending functions / ceremonies, inviting and engaging guests and weightage given to her views / suggestions.
4.3.6 Freedom of choice

The sixth set of autonomy variable is an eight point scale concerned with women's freedom of choice on dressing, hair style, voting, and timing of sex with husband, cooking, talking with neighbours, using household items and worshiping God.

4.3.7 Violence against women

The seventh set of autonomy variable is a 10 point scale concerned with the ability of women to oppose violence against women in family. The autonomy of women on violence against women is measured based on questions asking women whether they experienced verbal abuse from husband and in laws, physical abuse by husband and in laws, ill treatment by husband and in laws, drinking habit of husband, harassment from husband / in laws, intimidation by family members and incidence of eve teasing.

4.3.8 Decision about contraception and child birth

The eighth set of autonomy variable is a four point scale concerned with women's ability to take independent decisions on timing of child birth, number and sex composition of children and adoption of family planning methods.

4.3.9 Total autonomy score

The overall level of women's autonomy was assessed based on the total score attained for all the above said eight dimension of autonomy variables. The details of autonomy variables, scoring and grouping of women into low, medium and high level of autonomy based on the total score attained by women for all the above said eight autonomy measures are given in annexure-III.