

Empowering Rural Women Through Human Resource Practices: Evidence from Self-Help Group Narratives in Telangana

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in enhancing the empowerment of rural women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Telangana, specifically across the districts of Nalgonda, Suryapet, and Yadadri Bhongiri. Drawing on a structured survey of 320 SHG participants, the research examines the influence of five key HRM practices training and development, performance recognition, leadership building, conflict resolution, and group facilitation on three dimensions of women's empowerment: economic, social, and psychological. Using correlation and regression analyses, the study finds that most HRM practices have a significant positive impact on empowerment outcomes. Training and leadership initiatives were particularly effective in enhancing women's skills, income-generating capacity, decision-making, and confidence. Recognition practices improved motivation and a sense of belonging. However, conflict resolution showed comparatively lower influence, suggesting the need for capacity-building in communication and negotiation within SHGs. The findings support the integration of structured HRM frameworks into rural development programs, emphasizing contextual relevance and community-based leadership models. By demonstrating the measurable relationship between HR practices and empowerment dimensions, the study contributes to the broader discourse on gender equity and grassroots development. It recommends that policymakers institutionalize HRM mechanisms especially training, feedback, and leadership development within SHGs to foster inclusive growth. These insights offer a replicable model for rural empowerment that can be scaled across similar socio-economic regions.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Human Resource Practices, Self-Help Groups, Rural Development, Telangana

Introduction

The empowerment of rural women has become a significant focus in India's development agenda, especially in the context of inclusive and sustainable employment. In the state of Telangana, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have served as crucial platforms for encouraging financial independence and community participation among women. However, while the economic contributions of SHGs have been widely acknowledged, the structured role of Human Resource (HR) practices within these groups has not been sufficiently explored. Effective HR strategies, including skill development, performance acknowledgment, leadership encouragement, and conflict management, can enhance the collective functioning and individual progress of women involved in SHG-led employment initiatives (Kabeer, 1999; Baruah, 2018). This study aims to analyze how HR practices influence the multidimensional empowerment of women engaged in SHGs across rural areas of Nalgonda, Suryapet, and Yadadri Bhuvanagiri districts in Telangana. Empowerment is considered across three critical aspects: economic stability, social engagement, and psychological well-being, following frameworks developed by Malhotra et al. (2002) and Cornwall (2016). The purpose is to assess the extent to which localized HR practices support personal and group-level empowerment outcomes and to identify areas that require improvement.

The scope of this research is confined to active SHG members who are directly involved in income-generating or developmental activities. A structured survey was used to gather responses from 320 participants, and statistical methods specifically correlation and regression analysis were applied to understand the relationship between HR practices and empowerment indicators. By highlighting the practical application of HR methods within grassroots frameworks, this study provides meaningful insights for policy formulation and rural employment planning. The findings suggest that empowering women through targeted HR approaches not only strengthens SHG operations but also supports broader goals of gender equity and social inclusion.

Review of Literature

Empowering women in rural areas has long been a focus of development policy and academic discourse. Several studies have emphasized the importance of institutional support in enhancing women's access to resources, decision-making power, and socio-economic mobility. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as the process by which individuals gain the ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was previously denied.

This foundational idea continues to shape contemporary gender-focused studies in rural development. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as significant tools in promoting grassroots empowerment, particularly for rural women in India. According to Desai and Joshi (2019), participation in SHGs has led to improvements in savings habits, credit access, and community engagement among women in underserved areas. Similarly, Panda (2018) found that women involved in SHGs experienced positive shifts in self-perception, negotiation ability, and income generation. Human Resource (HR) practices, though commonly applied in formal organizational settings, are increasingly relevant in community-based models like SHGs. Training and development, leadership building, recognition of efforts, and conflict resolution strategies play a vital role in shaping outcomes. However, research on how these HR practices affect women's empowerment specifically in SHG contexts remains limited. While some literature, such as that by Baruah (2018), connects empowerment to structured interventions, few studies investigate the combined effect of multiple HR elements on women's economic, social, and psychological development. Moreover, region-specific research in states like Telangana is sparse, despite the active role of SHGs in the state's rural employment landscape.

Research Gap

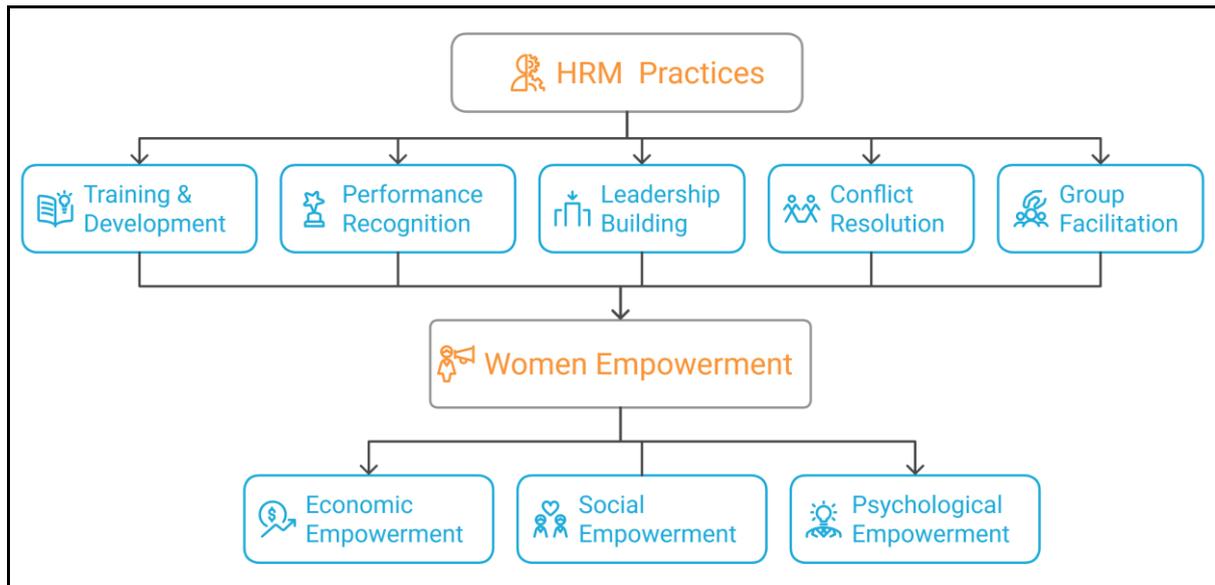
Most existing studies focus either on the financial outcomes of SHG participation or on isolated empowerment indicators. There is limited empirical research assessing how integrated HR practices within SHGs contribute to multi-dimensional empowerment. Furthermore, the regional focus on Telangana particularly districts like Nalgonda, Suryapet, and Yadadri Bhongiri remains underexplored. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how localized HR interventions influence women's empowerment in a structured and measurable way.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework (Figure 1) proposes that, explores how Human Resource (HR) practices within Self-Help Groups (SHGs) contribute to the empowerment of rural women in Telangana. Empowerment is viewed through three dimensions: economic, social, and psychological, following Kabeer's (1999) approach. The key HR practices examined include training and development, leadership building, performance recognition, conflict resolution and group facilitation. These HR practices are considered the independent variables that influence women's empowerment, the dependent variable, by enhancing skills, confidence, leadership abilities, and group cohesion. Training improves income-generating capacities, leadership development fosters decision-making and participation, and recognition boosts

motivation. Conflict resolution supports harmony within SHGs, which is crucial for sustained empowerment. The framework acknowledges the unique socio-cultural context of rural Telangana as a moderating factor affecting these relationships. Overall, this model provides a basis for understanding and measuring how targeted HR interventions in grassroots organizations can promote holistic empowerment of rural women.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



Objectives

1. To examine the demographic profile of women participating in Self-Help Groups (SHGs).
2. To evaluate the impact of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices such as training, leadership building, performance recognition, conflict resolution, and group facilitation on the empowerment of rural women.
3. To analyze the relationship between HRM practices and the economic, social, and psychological empowerment of women using statistical methods.

Hypotheses

- **H₀₁:** There is no significant relationship between HRM practices and the economic empowerment of women in SHGs.
- **H₀₂:** There is no significant relationship between HRM practices and the social empowerment of women in SHGs.

- **H₀₃:** There is no significant relationship between HRM practices and the psychological empowerment of women in SHGs.

Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative approach to examine how Human Resource Management (HRM) practices influence the empowerment of rural women involved in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Telangana. The study focuses on women from three districts Nalgonda, Suryapet, and Yadadri Bhongiri selected through purposive sampling to include those actively participating in SHG activities for a minimum of one year. Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire developed after reviewing relevant literature. The instrument gathered information on participants' demographic characteristics, specific HRM practices such as training, leadership development, performance recognition, conflict resolution, and indicators of empowerment across economic, social, and psychological dimensions. For analysis, descriptive statistics were used to profile respondents and summarize empowerment levels. Relationships between HRM practices and empowerment dimensions were explored through correlation and regression analyses using SPSS software. Hypotheses were tested with a significance level of 0.05 to determine statistical validity. A structured questionnaire comprising 32 items on a 5-point Likert scale was administered, with Cronbach's alpha values indicating strong internal consistency, all exceeding 0.85 Ethical protocols were strictly observed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting their anonymity throughout the study.

RESULTS

Demographic profile

The demographic profile of the 320 women participating in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across the districts of Nalgonda, Suryapet, and Yadadri Bhongiri reveals diverse characteristics (Table 1). The majority of respondents are young to middle-aged adults, with 31.25% aged between 26 and 35 years and 25% in the 18 to 25 years bracket. Women aged 36 to 45 constitute 21.88%, while only a small percentage (6.25%) are above 60 years, indicating that SHG membership primarily attracts women in their active social and economic years. Educational attainment among participants varies considerably; 34.38% have completed secondary education, 21.88% are graduates, and 12.50% hold postgraduate degrees. However, 12.50% have no formal education, and 18.75% have only primary schooling,

reflecting a broad spectrum of literacy and educational exposure. Most women (65.62%) are married, while 28.12% are single; widowed and divorced women each represent just over 3% of the sample. Geographically, the sample is fairly balanced with 37.50% from Nalgonda and 31.25% each from Suryapet and Yadadri Bhongiri, ensuring representative regional coverage. Regarding experience within SHGs, 40.62% have been members for one to three years, 28.12% for four to six years, and 15.62% for more than seven years, suggesting a significant portion with considerable exposure to group activities and HRM practices. This demographic diversity provides an important context for examining how Human Resource Management interventions impact the economic, social, and psychological empowerment of women in rural Telangana.

Table 1. Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	80	25.00
	26–35	100	31.25
	36–45	70	21.88
	46–60	50	15.62
	60+	20	6.25
Education Level	No formal education	40	12.50
	Primary	60	18.75
	Secondary	110	34.38
	Graduate	70	21.88
	Postgraduate	40	12.50
Marital Status	Single	90	28.12
	Married	210	65.62
	Widowed	10	3.12
	Divorced	10	3.12
District	Nalgonda	120	37.50
	Suryapet	100	31.25
	Yadadri Bhongiri	100	31.25
Years in SHG	<1 year	50	15.62
	1–3 years	130	40.62
	4–6 years	90	28.12
	7+ years	50	15.62

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis in Table 2 reveals statistically significant positive relationships between various Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and the three dimensions of women's empowerment—economic, social, and psychological—among SHG members. Leadership building exhibits the strongest association across all empowerment aspects, with

correlation coefficients of 0.673 for economic, 0.641 for social, and 0.689 for psychological empowerment, indicating its critical role in enhancing women's capacities. Group facilitation and motivation also show high correlations, particularly with psychological empowerment ($r = 0.701$), suggesting that fostering supportive group dynamics strongly contributes to women's confidence and mental well-being. Training and development demonstrate robust positive relationships as well, with coefficients ranging from 0.603 to 0.652, highlighting the importance of skill-building activities for improving women's economic and social status. Performance recognition correlates positively across all dimensions (ranging from 0.588 to 0.619), reinforcing the motivational impact of acknowledging women's efforts. Conflict resolution, while still significantly correlated (coefficients between 0.554 and 0.590), has comparatively weaker associations, indicating potential room for enhancing this practice within SHGs. All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level, underscoring the reliable influence of HRM practices in promoting holistic empowerment among rural women.

Table 2. Correlation analysis HR Practices and women Empowerment

HR Practices	Economic Empowerment	Social Empowerment	Psychological Empowerment
Training & Development	0.652	0.603	0.627
Performance Recognition	0.619	0.588	0.611
Leadership Building	0.673	0.641	0.689
Conflict Resolution	0.554	0.567	0.590
Group Facilitation & Motivation	0.638	0.662	0.701
Note: All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) (N = 320)			

Regression Analysis

Hypotheses (H₀₁)

The regression analysis results, as shown in the model summary, indicate a strong positive relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and the economic empowerment of women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The model (Table 3) explains approximately 45% of the variance in economic empowerment ($R^2 = 0.450$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.439$), demonstrating a good fit. The ANOVA results (Table 4) confirm the model's significance ($F = 34.51$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that HRM practices collectively have a meaningful impact on economic empowerment. Examining individual predictors, training and development has the highest standardized beta coefficient (Table 5) ($\beta = 0.266$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its critical role in enhancing economic outcomes for women.

Performance recognition ($\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$) and group facilitation ($\beta = 0.247$, $p < 0.001$) also show significant positive effects, reinforcing the importance of motivating and supporting women within SHGs. Leadership building contributes positively as well ($\beta = 0.174$, $p = 0.005$), although with a comparatively smaller impact. Conflict resolution does not show a statistically significant effect on economic empowerment ($\beta = 0.083$, $p = 0.172$), suggesting this area may require further development in HRM strategies. The findings reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}), confirming that HRM practices significantly influence the economic empowerment of women in rural SHGs. This underscores the value of tailored HR interventions to support women's financial independence and livelihood improvement.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.671	.450	.439	3.872

Table 4. Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2586.12	5	517.22	34.51	.000
Residual	3162.88	314	10.07		
Total	5749.00	319			

Table 5. Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.109	1.122	—	3.66	.000
Training & Development	0.321	0.072	.266	4.46	.000
Performance Recognition	0.284	0.065	.234	4.37	.000
Leadership Building	0.219	0.078	.174	2.81	.005
Conflict Resolution	0.092	0.067	.083	1.37	.172
Group Facilitation	0.301	0.074	.247	4.07	.000

Hypothesis (H₀₂)

The regression model examining the relationship between Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and social empowerment among women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) demonstrates a significant positive association. The model (Table 6) accounts for 47.5% of the variance in social empowerment ($R^2 = 0.475$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.464$), indicating a strong explanatory power. The ANOVA test (Table 7) confirms the overall model's statistical significance ($F = 41.47$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that HRM practices collectively influence

social empowerment outcomes. Among the individual HR practices, training and development emerges as the most influential predictor (Table 8) ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$), emphasizing the importance of skill enhancement in improving women's social roles and participation. Performance recognition ($\beta = 0.246$, $p < 0.001$) and group facilitation ($\beta = 0.261$, $p < 0.001$) also show significant positive effects, underscoring the value of motivation and group cohesion in fostering social empowerment. Leadership building is positively associated as well ($\beta = 0.191$, $p = 0.002$). Although conflict resolution displays a positive beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.098$), its effect is not statistically significant ($p = 0.098$), suggesting this HR practice might need strengthening to better support social empowerment. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, confirming that HRM practices significantly impact the social empowerment of women in rural SHGs. This highlights the need for focused HR strategies to strengthen women's social networks and community engagement.

Table 6. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.689	.475	.464	3.759

Table 7. Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2932.38	5	586.48	41.47	.000
Residual	3245.92	314	10.34		
Total	6178.30	319			

Table 8. Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.842	1.148	—	3.35	.001
Training & Development	0.342	0.075	.281	4.56	.000
Performance Recognition	0.298	0.071	.246	4.20	.000
Leadership Building	0.241	0.076	.191	3.17	.002
Conflict Resolution	0.113	0.068	.098	1.66	.098
Group Facilitation	0.318	0.072	.261	4.42	.000

Hypothesis (H_{03})

The regression analysis assessing the effect of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices on the psychological empowerment of women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) indicates a statistically significant relationship. The model (Table 9) explains 42.9% of the

variance in psychological empowerment ($R^2 = 0.429$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.417$), demonstrating a meaningful level of explanatory power. The ANOVA results (Table 10) confirm the model's significance ($F = 32.81$, $p < 0.001$), affirming the collective influence of HRM practices on women's psychological empowerment. Among the HRM variables, training and development is a strong positive predictor (Table 11) ($\beta = 0.245$, $p < 0.001$), emphasizing its role in enhancing women's confidence and self-efficacy. Performance recognition ($\beta = 0.229$, $p < 0.001$) and group facilitation ($\beta = 0.240$, $p < 0.001$) also significantly contribute to psychological empowerment, highlighting the importance of acknowledgment and group support. Leadership building has a notable positive effect as well ($\beta = 0.213$, $p = 0.001$). However, conflict resolution, despite a positive beta ($\beta = 0.091$), does not show statistical significance ($p = 0.154$), suggesting this area may require further strengthening to better support psychological outcomes. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) is rejected, confirming that HRM practices significantly affect the psychological empowerment of women in rural SHGs. These findings support integrating comprehensive HR strategies to promote women's mental well-being and empowerment in community settings.

Table 9. Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.655	.429	.417	3.902

Table 10. Anova

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2497.73	5	499.55	32.81	.000
Residual	3251.27	314	10.36		
Total	5749.00	319			

Table 11. Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.965	1.171	—	3.39	.001
Training & Development	0.304	0.078	.245	3.90	.000
Performance Recognition	0.287	0.074	.229	3.88	.000
Leadership Building	0.266	0.079	.213	3.37	.001
Conflict Resolution	0.103	0.072	.091	1.43	.154
Group Facilitation	0.291	0.076	.240	3.83	.000

Discussion

The study underscores the essential role that Human Resource Management (HRM) practices play in advancing the empowerment of rural women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Telangana. The demographic data suggest a varied participant base in terms of age, education, and duration of SHG involvement, indicating that empowerment strategies must be responsive to differing backgrounds and experiences. Statistical analyses consistently revealed positive associations between HR practices and empowerment outcomes. Correlation results showed that all HR variables training and development, performance recognition, leadership building, conflict resolution, and group facilitation are meaningfully related to economic, social, and psychological empowerment. Regression findings further supported these relationships, with training, recognition, leadership, and facilitation demonstrating the strongest influence. These HR components appear to drive key capabilities such as income generation, decision-making, and confidence building. However, conflict resolution exhibited a relatively modest impact, suggesting that this area may not be fully optimized within current SHG structures. This finding signals a need for more robust interpersonal and grievance-handling mechanisms to support group cohesion and individual well-being. The results affirm that when HR practices are thoughtfully integrated into community-level programs, they contribute to multidimensional empowerment. The interplay between formal HR structures and local social dynamics reveals a promising pathway for inclusive rural development.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study underscores the pivotal role of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in facilitating the empowerment of rural women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Telangana. The analysis of demographic data reveals that women from diverse age groups, education levels, and marital statuses actively participate in SHGs, signifying their broad relevance in rural contexts. The correlational and regression findings clearly demonstrate that HR interventions particularly training and development, leadership building, performance recognition, and group facilitation positively influence economic, social, and psychological empowerment outcomes. While conflict resolution showed relatively weaker effects, it remains a critical dimension for group sustainability and emotional well-being. These findings point to the need for integrated HR frameworks in rural development programs. Policymakers and development agencies should prioritize structured HR strategies within

SHGs, including ongoing leadership development, performance feedback systems, and culturally contextualized training. Strengthening interpersonal conflict resolution within SHGs can further enhance group dynamics and long-term empowerment. Ultimately, the study presents a replicable model for leveraging HRM to drive gender-inclusive and sustainable rural development, thereby aligning with broader national goals of equity and grassroots participation.

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