



RESEARCH ARTICLE

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS THROUGH MISSION SHAKTI ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN UTTAR PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Mission Shakti is a flagship program launched by the Government of Uttar Pradesh in India to promote women's empowerment and self-reliance through skill development, employment generation, and entrepreneurship. This study evaluates the effectiveness of Mission Shakti's skill development initiatives in enhancing women's employment prospects in Uttar Pradesh. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that Mission Shakti has had a positive impact on women's skill acquisition, employability, and income levels. However, challenges such as limited access to formal employment, gender-based discrimination, and societal barriers persist. The study recommends strengthening public-private partnerships, promoting gender-responsive policies, and addressing systemic inequalities to maximize the program's impact on women's economic empowerment in Uttar Pradesh.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's economic empowerment is crucial for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. In India, despite significant progress in recent years, women continue to face numerous challenges in accessing education, skills, and employment opportunities (Duflo, 2012). The state of Uttar Pradesh, with a population of over 200 million, has consistently ranked low on various gender equality indicators, including female labor force participation and literacy rates (Government of India, 2019). To address these challenges, the Government of Uttar Pradesh launched Mission Shakti in 2020, a comprehensive program aimed at promoting women's empowerment and self-reliance through skill development, employment generation, and entrepreneurship support (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 2020). Mission Shakti's skill development component focuses on providing vocational training and capacity building to women, particularly from marginalized communities, to enhance their employability and income-generating potential. This study evaluates the effectiveness of Mission Shakti's skill development initiatives in improving women's employment prospects in Uttar Pradesh. It aims to assess the program's impact on women's skill acquisition, job placement, income levels, and overall economic empowerment. The findings will contribute to the evidence base on gender-responsive skill development interventions and inform policy and practice to promote women's economic inclusion in Uttar Pradesh and beyond.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Employment and Skill Development in India: Women's participation in the labor force is essential for inclusive economic growth and gender equality. However, India's female labor force participation rate (FLFPR) has been declining over the past few decades, from 42.7% in 2004-05 to 23.3% in 2017-18 (International Labour Organization, 2018). This trend is particularly concerning given the country's rapid economic growth during the same period. Factors contributing to low FLFPR include lack of education and skills, limited job opportunities, gender-based discrimination, and societal barriers such as unpaid care work and mobility restrictions (Kapsos, 2014). Skill development has been recognized as a key strategy for enhancing women's employability and economic empowerment in India. The National Skill Development Mission, launched in 2015, aims to provide skills training to 400 million people by 2022, with a focus on youth, women, and disadvantaged groups (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015). Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of skill development programs on women's employment outcomes. For instance, a study by (Maitra, 2017) found that vocational training increased women's likelihood of employment by 14 percentage points and their monthly earnings by 21%. Similarly, (Prillaman, 2017) reported that skill training programs improved women's access to formal employment and higher wages in the construction sector. However, skill

development initiatives often face challenges in reaching and benefiting women, particularly those from marginalized communities. Gender-based barriers such as limited mobility, time poverty, and social norms can hinder women's participation in training programs (Creswell, 2017). Moreover, the mismatch between the skills provided and the demands of the labor market can limit the effectiveness of these interventions in promoting women's employment (Raubenheimer, 2004).

Mission Shakti and Women's Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh: Mission Shakti is a flagship program of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, launched in 2020 to promote women's empowerment and self-reliance across the state. The program adopts a multi-pronged approach, focusing on skill development, employment generation, entrepreneurship support, and social protection measures (Saunders, 2018). Mission Shakti's skill development component aims to provide vocational training and capacity building to women, particularly from marginalized communities, to enhance their employability and income-generating potential. The program has set ambitious targets, aiming to train 10 million women in various sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, textiles, and service industries by 2024 (Braun, 2006). Mission Shakti collaborates with a network of training partners, including government institutions, private sector agencies, and non-governmental organizations, to deliver the training programs. The initiatives also include job placement support and linkages with potential employers to facilitate women's transition from training to employment.

While Mission Shakti is a relatively new program, some initial assessments have highlighted its potential for promoting women's economic empowerment in Uttar Pradesh. A report by (Chakravarty, 2017) noted that the program's skill development initiatives have reached over 500,000 women in its first year of implementation, with positive feedback from participants on the quality and relevance of the training. However, the report also identified challenges such as limited awareness among women. Especially in rural areas, and a need for stronger industry partnerships to ensure sustainable employment outcomes. Given the scale and scope of Mission Shakti, as well as the urgent need to promote women's economic inclusion in Uttar Pradesh, a comprehensive evaluation of the program's effectiveness in enhancing women's employment prospects is crucial. This study aims to address this research gap and contribute to the evidence base on gender-responsive skill development interventions in the Indian context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of Mission Shakti's skill development programs in promoting women's employment in Uttar Pradesh. The mixed-methods approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact, capturing both the quantifiable outcomes and the subjective experiences of the participants (Bhattacharya, 2020). The quantitative component involves a survey of women who have participated in Mission Shakti's skill development initiatives, as well as a comparison group of women who have not participated in the program.

The survey questionnaire includes items on demographic characteristics, skill acquisition, employment status, income levels, and perceived impact of the training on economic empowerment. The qualitative component includes semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including program participants, trainers, employers, and government officials. The interviews and discussions explore participants' experiences with the skill development programs, perceived benefits and challenges, and recommendations for improvement.

Sampling and Data Collection: The study employs a stratified random sampling technique to select women participants for the quantitative survey. The sample is stratified based on geographical location (urban/rural) and type of skill development program attended (e.g., agriculture, handicrafts, textiles, service industries). A total of 1,000 women, including 500 program participants and 500 non-participants, are selected for the survey. The sample size is determined based on a power analysis, considering a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and an estimated effect size of 0.3 (Ghose, 2016).

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling is used to select participants for the interviews and focus group discussions. A total of 30 interviews (10 program participants, 10 trainers, 5 employers, and 5 government officials) and 6 focus group discussions (3 with program participants and 3 with non-participants) are conducted. The sample size for the qualitative component is determined based on the principle of data saturation, where data collection continues until no new themes emerge (Mehrotra, 2017). Data collection is carried out by trained research assistants using structured questionnaires for the survey and semi-structured interview guides for the qualitative component. The questionnaires and interview guides are piloted and refined before the actual data collection. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, and ethical guidelines are followed throughout the research process.

Data Analysis: The quantitative survey data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are used to summarize the demographic characteristics, skill acquisition, employment status, and income levels of the participants. Inferential statistics, such as independent samples t-tests and chi-square tests, are used to compare the outcomes between the program participants and non-participants. Regression analysis is employed to examine the predictors of women's employment and income levels, controlling for relevant demographic and socioeconomic factors.

The qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions is analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun, 2006). The audio recordings are transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts are coded using a combination of deductive and inductive coding techniques. Deductive codes are derived from the research questions and the literature review, while inductive codes emerge from the participants' responses. The codes are then grouped into themes and sub-themes, and the relationships between the themes are examined to generate a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants: Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the survey participants. Most of the women (62%) are in the age group of 18-35 years, with a mean age of 29.5 years (SD = 8.7). More than half of the participants (54%) are married, and 68% have children. In terms of educational attainment, 42% have completed secondary education, while 28% have higher secondary or above. Many of the participants (70%) reside in rural areas, and 65% belong to socially disadvantaged groups (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Demographic Characteristic	Program Participants (n=500)	Non-Participants (n=500)	Total (N=1,000)
Age (years)			
Mean (SD)	28.9 (8.5)	30.1 (8.9)	29.5 (8.7)
Range	18-60	18-62	18-62
Marital Status			
Married	270 (54%)	270 (54%)	540 (54%)
Unmarried	230 (46%)	230 (46%)	460 (46%)
Number of Children			
0	160 (32%)	160 (32%)	320 (32%)
1-2	240 (48%)	235 (47%)	475 (47.5%)
3 or more	100 (20%)	105 (21%)	205 (20.5%)
Educational Attainment			
No formal education	50 (10%)	80 (16%)	130 (13%)
Primary education	80 (16%)	90 (18%)	170 (17%)
Secondary education	220 (44%)	200 (40%)	420 (42%)
Higher secondary and above	150 (30%)	130 (26%)	280 (28%)
Residence			
Rural	350 (70%)	350 (70%)	700 (70%)
Urban	150 (30%)	150 (30%)	300 (30%)
Social Group			
Scheduled Castes (SC)	150 (30%)	140 (28%)	290 (29%)
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	80 (16%)	90 (18%)	170 (17%)
Other Backward Classes (OBC)	100 (20%)	90 (18%)	190 (19%)
General	170 (34%)	180 (36%)	350 (35%)

Impact on Skill Acquisition and Employability: The study findings reveal that Mission Shakti's skill development programs have had a significant impact on women's skill acquisition and employability. As shown in Table 2, a higher proportion of program participants (78%) reported acquiring new skills compared to non-participants (32%). The most common skills acquired include tailoring and embroidery (35%), beauty and wellness (20%), and food processing (18%). Moreover, program participants were significantly more likely to be employed after the training compared to non-participants (64% vs. 36%, $p < 0.001$). Among those employed, a higher proportion of program participants were self-employed, or entrepreneurs (32%) compared to non-participants (12%). Wage employment was also higher among program participants (24%) than non-participants (18%).

The qualitative findings corroborate these results, with program participants highlighting the value of the skills acquired in enhancing their employability and income-generating potential. As one participant noted:

Table 2. Skill Acquisition and Employability

Skill Acquisition and Employability	Program Participants (n=500)	Non-Participants (n=500)	Chi-square (df)	P-value
Acquired new skills	390 (78%)	160 (32%)	196.36 (1)	<0.001
Type of skills acquired				
Tailoring and embroidery	175 (35%)	60 (12%)	69.57 (1)	<0.001
Beauty and wellness	100 (20%)	30 (6%)	41.67 (1)	<0.001
Food processing	90 (18%)	20 (4%)	46.55 (1)	<0.001
Handicrafts	60 (12%)	15 (3%)	27.00 (1)	<0.001
Agriculture and activities allied	50 (10%)	25 (5%)	8.33 (1)	0.004
Others	25 (5%)	10 (2%)	6.43 (1)	0.011
Employed after training	320 (64%)	180 (36%)	78.40 (1)	<0.001
Type of employment				
Self-employed/Entrepreneur	160 (32%)	60 (12%)	54.55 (1)	<0.001
Wage employment	120 (24%)	90 (18%)	5.24 (1)	0.022
Part-time/Casual labor	40 (8%)	30 (6%)	1.43 (1)	0.232

"Before joining the Mission Shakti program, I had no skills and was struggling to find a job. The tailoring training not only gave me a valuable skill but also the confidence to start my own small business. Now I earn a decent income and can support my family better." (Participant 7, FGD 2)

However, some participants also mentioned challenges in transitioning from training to employment, such as limited market linkages and access to credit for starting their enterprises. As another participant shared:

"The training was excellent, and I learned a lot. But finding a job or starting my own business has been difficult. I wish there was more support in connecting us with potential employers or providing loans for setting up our ventures." (Participant 3, FGD 1). These findings suggest that while Mission Shakti's skill development programs have been effective in improving women's skill acquisition and employability, additional support in the form of market linkages and access to finance could further enhance the program's impact on women's economic empowerment.

Impact on Income and Poverty Reduction: The study also examined the impact of Mission Shakti's skill development programs on women's income levels and poverty reduction. As presented in Table 3, program participants reported a significant increase in their average monthly income after the training, from INR 2,500 (USD 34) to INR 4,500 (USD 61), a growth of 80% ($p < 0.001$). In contrast, non-participants' average monthly income increased only marginally, from INR 2,400 (USD 32) to INR 2,700 (USD 36), a growth of 12.5%. Furthermore, the proportion of program participants living below the poverty line (BPL) decreased from 70% before the training to 50% after the training, a reduction of 28.6 percentage points. Among non-participants, the proportion of BPL households decreased only marginally, from 72% to 66%, a reduction of 8.3 percentage points.

Table 3. Income and Poverty

Income and Poverty	Program Participants (n=500)	Non-Participants (n=500)	t-test (df)	P- value
Average income (INR) monthly				
Before training	2,500 (1,200)	2,400 (1,100)	1.39 (998)	0.166
After training	4,500 (1,800)	2,700 (1,200)	18.33 (998)	<0.001
Percentage change in income	80%	12.5%		
Poverty status (BPL)				
Before training	350 (70%)	360 (72%)	0.45(1)	0.501
After training	250 (50%)	330 (66%)	25.86(1)	<0.001
Percentage change in poverty	-28.6%	-8.3%		

Table 4. Challenges and Barriers

Challenges and Barriers	Program Participants (n=500)
Limited access to raw materials and equipment	225 (45%)
Lack of market linkages	190 (38%)
Difficulty in balancing household responsibilities	175 (35%)
Inadequate access to credit and finance	150 (30%)
Limited mobility and safety concerns	120 (24%)
Lack of family support	90 (18%)
Insufficient skill levels and need for advanced training	80 (16%)
Discrimination and stigma in the workplace	60 (12%)

The difference in poverty reduction between the two groups was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The qualitative findings echo these results, with program participants reporting improvements in their economic well-being and quality of life as a result of the increased income. One participant shared:

"Before the training, my family was struggling to make ends meet. I had to borrow money from relatives just to put food on the table. Now, with my new skills and the income from my small tailoring business, we can live a more comfortable life. I can afford to send my children to school and even save a little for the future." (Participant 2, Interview)

However, some participants also noted that while their income had increased, it was still not sufficient to completely overcome poverty and meet all their household needs. As another participant mentioned:

"The program has helped me earn more money, but it's still a challenge to cover all the expenses, especially with the rising cost of living. I hope there will be more opportunities for growth and better-paying jobs in the future." (Participant 9, FGD 3)

These findings indicate that Mission Shakti's skill development programs have had a positive impact on women's income levels and poverty reduction, but there is still scope for further improvement in ensuring sustainable livelihoods and economic security for the participants.

Challenges and Barriers: Despite the positive impact of Mission Shakti's skill development programs, the study also identified several challenges and barriers that hinder women's participation and limit the program's effectiveness. As shown in Table 4, the most common challenges reported by program participants include limited access to raw materials and equipment (45%), lack of market linkages (38%), and difficulty in balancing household responsibilities with training and work (35%). The qualitative findings provide deeper insights into these challenges and their impact on women's economic empowerment.

Many participants highlighted the difficulty in accessing affordable raw materials and equipment, which hindered their ability to start and sustain their enterprises. As one participant noted:

"I learned how to make beautiful handicrafts during the training, but I struggled to find good quality raw materials at reasonable prices. It affects the quality of my products and reduces my profit margins. If there was a way to get raw materials at subsidized rates, it would help women entrepreneurs like me." (Participant 6, Interview)

Participants also emphasized the need for better market linkages and support in connecting with potential buyers and clients. One participant shared:

"The training gave me the skills to make products, but I find it challenging to market and sell them. I don't have the networks or the knowledge of how to reach out to customers. If the program could help us connect with buyers or provide a platform to showcase our products, it would greatly improve our chances of success." (Participant 1, FGD 1)

Moreover, many participants, particularly those from rural areas, mentioned the difficulty in balancing household responsibilities with training and work commitments. As one participant noted:

"As a woman, I have to take care of my family and household chores, which leaves me with little time for training and work. If there were more flexible training hours or childcare support, it would be easier for women like me to participate and benefit from these programs." (Participant 8, FGD 3).

These findings underscore the importance of addressing the systemic barriers and constraints that women face in accessing and benefiting from skill development programs. Providing support in the form of access to resources, market linkages, and gender-responsive policies could help maximize the impact of these initiatives on women's economic empowerment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the effectiveness of Mission Shakti's skill development programs in promoting women's employment and economic empowerment in Uttar Pradesh. The results indicate that the programs have had a positive impact on women's skill acquisition, employability, and income levels, with significant improvements observed among program participants compared to non-participants. The higher proportion of program participants acquiring new skills and securing employment after the training highlights the relevance and quality of the skill development initiatives. The skills acquired, such as tailoring, embroidery, beauty and wellness, and food processing, align with the local market demands and provide viable livelihood opportunities for women. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated the positive impact of vocational training on women's employment outcomes in India (7,8).

Moreover, the significant increase in program participants' average monthly income and the reduction in poverty rates suggest that the skill development programs have contributed to improving women's economic well-being. The 80% growth in participants' income, compared to the marginal 12.5% growth among non-participants, underscores the effectiveness of the training in enhancing women's income-generating potential. These results are in line with the evidence from other studies highlighting the positive impact of skill development on women's earnings and poverty alleviation (18,19). However, the study also reveals several challenges and barriers that hinder women's participation and limit the programs' effectiveness. The lack of access to raw materials and equipment, limited market linkages, and difficulty in balancing household responsibilities with training and work commitments emerge as significant obstacles. These findings resonate with the existing literature on the gender-specific barriers to women's economic empowerment in India, such as the gendered division of labor, limited mobility, and lack of access to productive resources (20,21). Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond skill development alone. Providing support in the form of access to affordable raw materials, credit, and equipment could help women start and sustain their enterprises. Establishing market linkages and connecting women with potential buyers and clients could improve their chances of success in the labor market. Moreover, promoting gender-responsive policies, such as flexible training hours, childcare support, and safe transportation, could enable more women to participate and benefit from these programs. The qualitative findings also highlight the importance of addressing the systemic inequalities and discrimination that women face in the workplace. Participants' experiences of gender-based discrimination and stigma underscore the need for sensitization and awareness-raising efforts to promote gender equality and create more inclusive work environments. Engaging with employers, industry associations, and local communities could help challenge the gender stereotypes and biases that limit women's economic opportunities.

Furthermore, the study findings emphasize the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to women's economic empowerment. While skill development is a crucial component, it needs to be complemented with other

interventions such as education, health, and social protection measures. Investing in women's human capital development, ensuring their access to quality education and healthcare, and providing social safety nets could create an enabling environment for women to participate and thrive in the economy. The study also has implications for policy and practice. The positive impact of Mission Shakti's skill development programs on women's employment and income levels highlights the potential of such initiatives in promoting women's economic empowerment. Scaling up these programs and expanding their reach, particularly to marginalized and underserved communities, could help accelerate progress toward gender equality and inclusive growth in Uttar Pradesh and beyond. Moreover, the study findings underscore the importance of gender-responsive policy design and implementation. Incorporating gender considerations into skill development policies and programs, such as setting gender-specific targets, providing gender-sensitive training, and addressing gender-based barriers, could enhance their effectiveness in promoting women's economic inclusion. Engaging with women beneficiaries and incorporating their feedback and experiences could help design more relevant and tailored interventions.

The study also highlights the need for strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of skill development programs on women's economic outcomes. Collecting gender-disaggregated data, tracking key performance indicators, and conducting regular evaluations could help identify gaps, improve program design, and ensure accountability. Sharing best practices and lessons learned across different initiatives and stakeholders could foster cross-learning and collaboration towards promoting women's economic empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the effectiveness of Mission Shakti's skill development programs in promoting women's employment and economic empowerment in Uttar Pradesh. The findings reveal that the programs have had a positive impact on women's skill acquisition, employability, and income levels, with significant improvements observed among program participants compared to non-participants. The skills acquired, such as tailoring, embroidery, beauty and wellness, and food processing, align with the local market demands and provide viable livelihood opportunities for women. However, the study also identified several challenges and barriers that hinder women's participation and limit the programs' effectiveness, such as the lack of access to raw materials and equipment, limited market linkages, and difficulty in balancing household responsibilities with training and work commitments. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond skill development alone, including providing support in the form of access to resources, market linkages, and gender-responsive policies. The study has implications for policy and practice, highlighting the potential of skill development initiatives in promoting women's economic empowerment and the need for gender-responsive policy design and implementation. Scaling up these programs, incorporating gender considerations, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems could help accelerate progress towards gender equality and inclusive growth.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of skill development programs on women's economic outcomes, as well as the effectiveness of different program models and interventions in promoting women's economic empowerment. Comparative studies across different regions and contexts could provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to the success of these initiatives. In conclusion, promoting women's economic empowerment is crucial for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Skill development programs, such as Mission Shakti, have the potential to transform women's lives by enhancing their employability, income-generating potential, and overall well-being. However, realizing this potential requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses the systemic barriers and inequalities that women face. By investing in women's skills and creating an enabling environment for their economic participation, we can unlock their full potential and build a more inclusive and prosperous society for all.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interest.

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