



**Title registration for a review proposal:
What are the effects of women's self-help group programs on
women's empowerment? A Systematic Review**

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Submitted to the Coordinating Group of:

- Crime and Justice
 Education
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Plans to co-register:

- No
 Yes Cochrane Other
 Maybe

Please complete this form to outline your proposal for a Campbell International Development Group systematic review. Email the completed form to Martina Vojtkova, Coordinator, Campbell International Development Group: mvojtкова@3ieimpact.org. Tel: +44 20 7958 8351.

Before completing this form:

- Make sure that your proposal falls within our scope, and that it has not already been covered in another Campbell or Cochrane review. Check existing registered titles at: www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.php and www.cochrane.org/reviews/en/topics.
- Authors are advised to use the [Campbell methods briefs](#) and Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions (see www.cochrane-handbook.org).
- Be aware that preparing a Campbell review requires a significant, long-term commitment. At least two authors are required before a title can be registered.

Instruction: Briefly address each item below. Provide enough information to allow the IDCG to evaluate the scope of the review, appropriateness for the

Campbell Collaboration, and any possible overlap with existing registered reviews.

TITLE OF THE REVIEW

What are the effects of women's self-help group programs on women's empowerment? A Systematic Review

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Briefly describe the problem, the relevance to policy and practice, and the objective(s) of the review. The objective(s) should be listed as questions which the review will aim to answer.

Background: The concept of women's empowerment has gained increased attention over the past two decades. The idea that the empowerment of women is an essential component of international development first held prominence at the ICPD conference in Cairo in 1994 and then again at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995. These conferences marked a shift from thinking of women as targets for fertility control policies to acknowledging women as autonomous agents with rights. Since these landmark events, there has been an explosion of conceptual and empirical work that attempts to gain a deeper understanding about how empowerment works, how it can be fostered and what kind of impacts it can have on the lives of women and their families.

Along with the burgeoning development of empowerment as a concept that garnered international recognition came grassroots movements aimed at empowering disenfranchised communities with women playing a central role. This movement can be seen as a response to the lack of representation of grassroots women's groups at the major international conferences. Simultaneously, given global recognition of the feminization of poverty, a wave of microfinance programs directed specifically at rural women became more prevalent. Participants and planners soon realized that while these programs were initially designed as poverty reduction programs, they had the unexpected consequence of empowering women by enabling women to take more active roles in decision-making on everything from household finances to healthcare. The basic assumptions undergirding these income-generating programs are that giving women access to working capital can increase a women's ability to "generate choices and exercise bargaining power as well as develop a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes, and the right to control one's life" (UNIFEM, 2000). Today, women's empowerment is considered a central outcome of microfinance programs.

Microfinance programs are just one example of programs that can encourage the empowerment of women. More generally, self-help group programs, involve groups of people who gather together and provide support for each other. The types of self-help groups are numerous and can include collective finance and enterprise (savings and loans, group credit, collective income-generation, joint farming), cultural groups (burial societies, community

development, religious groups), advocacy and social justice (human rights, environmental protection, property rights, labor rights), self-education (life skills, capacity-building, health education) and health (family planning, reproductive health services). Such groups are created with the underlying assumption that when individuals join together to take action towards overcoming obstacles and attaining social change, individual and collective empowerment can result. In addition, self-help groups have been shown to facilitate the formation of social capital and mobilization (IFAD 2003).

As a result of this explosion of attention and programming, many different perspectives, definitions, measures and outcomes have been associated with women's empowerment. The growing literature presents many different definitions of empowerment and no one definition seems to be universally accepted. One of the more comprehensive definitions is from a study by Kabeer (2000), which states that empowerment is "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them; a process that entails thinking outside the system and challenging the status quo, where people can make choices from the vantage point of real alternatives without punishingly high costs."

Depending on the type of group program, the measure of empowerment can look like and at what level it is measured varies. The literature examining empowerment as an individual outcome most frequently examines five realms within which empowerment can happen: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological (Malhotra et al., 2002).

Objectives:

1. What is the evidence for the impact of women's self-help group programs on women's empowerment in low and middle-income countries?
2. What are the perspectives of female participants on the impact of participation in women's self-help groups in low and middle-income countries on women's empowerment?

EXISTING REVIEWS

List any existing systematic reviews on the topic, and justify the need for this review if existing reviews exist or are in progress.

We are not aware of any existing systematic reviews on this topic specifically but several reviews address similar or overlapping questions including the following:

Duvendack, M., Palmer-Jones, R., Copestake, J.G., Hooper, L., Loke, Y. and Rao, N. (2011) What is the evidence of the impact of microfinance on the well-being of poor people? London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

Stewart, R., van Rooyen, C., Dickson, K., Majoro, M. and de Wet, T. (2010) What is the impact of microfinance on poor people? A systematic review of

evidence from sub-Saharan Africa. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, University of London.

Stewart, R., van Rooyen, C. and de Wet, T. (2011) Do micro-credit, micro-savings and micro-leasing serve as effective financial inclusion interventions enabling poor people, and especially women, to engage in meaningful economic opportunities in LMICs? London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

Vaessen et al. forthcoming in C2 library:
<http://campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/178/>

NOTE: The Vaessen et al. review analyses quantitative studies that examine women's control over household resources as a result of microcredit programs. We plan to look at both qualitative and quantitative studies evaluating microcredit self help group programs but will exclude micro-credit self help groups that are evaluated quantitatively using "women's control over household resources" as an outcome from our analyses so as not to overlap with this thorough and high quality review.

DEFINE THE POPULATION

Specify the types of populations to be included and excluded, with thought given to aspects such as demographic factors or their setting.

In analysing studies of women's self-help group programs, the following inclusion/exclusion criteria will be applied to the identified studies:

Location

- Include studies of interventions in low- and middle-income countries as defined by the World Bank (http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups#Low_income).
- Exclude studies of interventions in high-income countries.

Time period

- Include studies conducted from 1980 - 2012.
- Exclude studies that were not conducted within this time frame.

Type of women's self-help group program

- Include studies on self-help group programs (initiated by either a development agency or generated from within a community) where female participants physically come together and receive some group intervention.
- Exclude studies evaluating individual self-help or non-self-help group programs.

DEFINE THE INTERVENTION

Describe the intervention(s) and the comparison clearly in plain language. What is given, by whom, to whom, and for how long? What are the comparison conditions (what is usually provided to control/comparison groups who don't receive the intervention)?

Description of Intervention: We define self-help groups, also known as mutual aid or support groups, as those groups that involve people who provide support for each other and are created with the underlying assumption that when individuals join together to take action towards overcoming obstacles and attaining social change, individual and collective empowerment can result. For the purposes of this review, we are looking at groups where participation is not limited exclusively to women but where impacts on women are assessed separately from men. We plan to examine both those groups that have been initiated by a development agency and those that have come to existence without any direct external involvement – although groups that have been initiated without direct external involvement will be analysed separately. The types of interventions delivered by self-help groups that we plan to examine can include or contain the following components, provided they aim to promote women’s empowerment: collective finance and enterprise (savings and loans, group credit, collective income-generation, joint farming), cultural groups (burial societies, community development, religious groups), advocacy and social justice (human rights, environmental protection, property rights, labour rights), self-education (life skills, capacity-building, health education), health care (family planning, reproductive health services).

NOTE: The types of interventions to be included in the review will be narrowed down and finalized during the protocol stage, based on discussions with the advisory group, funder and a preliminary scoping of the literature.

Comparison Conditions: Comparison groups may be selected from the same or similar communities as the intervention group but who were not invited to participate in a self-help group, who were invited to participate in a similar intervention (microfinance, life skills programs) but without the group component, who receive no intervention, who receive another intervention, or who are on a wait-list.

OUTCOMES

List the primary and secondary outcomes for the review including all outcomes important to those who will be affected by and those who will make decisions about the intervention(s). Give thought to the inclusion of adverse and unintended effects, resource use and outcomes along the causal chain.

Primary Outcomes: The literature exploring empowerment as an outcome most frequently examines five domains of empowerment: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological (Malhotra et al., 2002). Within the five domains, measures can include but are not limited to:

Economic

- Economic Security
- Financial Decision-Making

- Paid labor force participation
- Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Familial/interpersonal

- Sexual Self-Efficacy
- Condom Use
- HH Decision-making Index
- Family size decision-making index
- Dyadic Sexual Communication Scale
- Gender Equitable Men scale

Political

- Gender Development Index
- Political participation
- Gender Empowerment Measure
- Women's right to vote and voting rates

Socio-cultural

- Freedom of Movement
- Level of Education
- Community Participation
- Literacy Rates
- Age at Marriage
- Social capital

Legal

- Livelihood Endowment Scale / Entitlement Scale
- Legislation against domestic violence
- Land Ownership
- Inheritance laws

Psychological

- Autonomy
- Self-Advocacy Scale
- Self-efficacy Scale
- Perceived control over life
- Cognitive development / well-being
- Happiness
- Self-reported Stress
- Depression Scales

Adverse or Unintended Outcomes: Empowerment studies have lent credence to the concept that women can and perhaps should be central actors in social and economic development. But it is important to note that empowerment of an individual or a small group alone may invoke negative reactions when familial, community and structural factors have not yet adjusted to women's changing roles. Intimate partner violence, for example, has been shown to remain, if not increase, in prevalence when women's economic empowerment is not coupled with additional family and community interventions (Dalal 2011; Ahmed 2005). Increasing women's monetary contributions to the family without also taking into account the upheaval this may cause with respect to expected gender and domestic

responsibilities, studies have also shown, can lead to increased household tensions and decreased emotional well-being for women (Ahmed 2005; Ahmed & Chowdhury 2001). Our review will also examine these types of adverse outcomes.

STUDY DESIGNS

List the types of studies to be included and excluded (please describe eligible study designs). It is desirable to specify at least three studies which you believe will be eligible for inclusion in the proposed review. Where the review aims to include quantitative and qualitative evidence, specify which of the review questions noted in section 2 will be addressed using each type of evidence.

We intend to conduct an integrated mixed-methods review in order to benefit from data generated through both types of research methods and to enhance the review's utility and impact for policymakers. This approach allows us to capture more high quality evidence than a traditional review so that we can more comprehensively answer the policy question. An 'integrated' review has three stages: 1) a summary of eligible trials, 2) a summary of relevant qualitative pieces, 3) a synthesis of both reports that 'goes beyond' the primary studies and generates new interpretations or hypotheses (Harden 2010).

To answer our review question, we will include:

- Objective 1: quantitative evaluations to include randomized control trials, non-randomized trials, case-control, cohort, pre-post with and without controls, and cross-sectional studies, quasi-RCTs, RDDs and 'natural experiments', and studies using Propensity Scores and Covariate Matching, differences in differences and other methods of regression correction such as instrumental variables and Heckman selection models. These studies must assess at least one variable from the defined empowerment outcome categories (economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, psychological).
- Objective 2: qualitative studies and include only those that explore empowerment from the perspectives of women participants in self-help group programs (such as studies using phenomenological, grounded theory or ethnographic methods). These studies must assess at least one variable from the defined empowerment outcome categories (economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, psychological, including adverse outcomes).

We will exclude:

- Objective 1 and 2 studies that do not contain one of the outcomes of interest.
- Objective 1: quantitative studies without any type of observable contrast (e.g. time or control group).
- Objective 2: qualitative studies that do not employ the rigorous methodologies or that do not draw from direct observation or direct reports from female self-help group program participants.

Studies that we might include in this review are:

1. Teshome E, Zenebe M, Metaferia H, Biadgilign S. (2011) "The Role of Self-Help Voluntary Associations for Women's Empowerment and Social Capital: The Experience of Women's Iddirs (Burial Societies) in Ethiopia." *J Community Health*. Dec 10.
2. IFAD/OE (2000) *The Republic of India: Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project: Completion Evaluation, Report 340-IN*. Rome, April.
3. Mayoux L. (1998) *Women's empowerment and micro-finance programmes: strategies for increasing impact*. *Dev Pract*. 1998 May;8(2):235-41.
4. Kim J, Watts C, Hargraces J, Ndhlovu L, Phetla G, Morison L, Busza J, Porter J, Pronyk P (2007) "Understanding the Impact of a Microfinance-Based Intervention on Women's Empowerment and the Reduction of Intimate Partner Violence in South Africa." *Am J Public Health*. 2007 October; 97(10): 1794–1802.
5. Bali Swain, Ranjula, and Adel Varghese. 2009. "Does Self Help Group Participation Lead to Asset Creation?" *World Development*, 37 (10): 1674-82.
6. Bali Swain, Ranjula, and Fan Yang Wallentin. 2009. "Does Microfinance Empower Women?" *International Review of Applied Economics*, 23(5): 541-56.
7. De Hoop, Thomas, Luuk van Kempen, Rik Linssen and Anouka van Eerdewijk. Forthcoming. "Women's Autonomy and Subjective Well-Being in India: How Village Norms Shape the Impact of Self-Help Groups." *Feminist Economics*.
8. Deininger, Klaus, and Yanyan Liu. 2009a. "Economic and Social Impacts of Self-Help Groups in India." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4884*, World Bank, Washington D.C.
9. ----- 2009b. "Longer-Term Economic Impacts of Self-Help Groups in India." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4886*, World Bank, Washington D.C.
10. Garikipati, Supriya. 2008. "The Impact of Lending to Women on Household Vulnerability and Women's Empowerment: Evidence from India." *World Development*, 36(12): 2620-42.
11. Gugerty, Mary Kay and Michael Kremer. 2008. "Outside Funding and the Dynamics of Participation in Community Associations." *American Journal of Political Science*

12. Holvoet, Natalie. 2005. "Credit and Women's Group Membership in South India: Testing Models of Intrahousehold Allocative Behavior." *Feminist Economics*, 11(3): 27-62.
13. Janssens, Wendy. 2011. "Externalities in Program Evaluation: The Impact of a Women's Empowerment Program on Immunization." *Journal of the European Economic Association*
14. Janssens, Wendy. 2010. "Women's Empowerment and the Creation of Social Capital in Indian Villages." *World Development*

AUTHOR(S) REVIEW TEAM

List names of those who will be cited as authors on the final publication.

<p>Lead reviewer This is the person who develops and co-ordinates the review team, discusses and assigns roles for individual members of the review team, liaises with the editorial base and takes responsibility for the on-going updates of the review</p>	<p>Name: Carinne D. Brody Title: Assistant Professor of Global Health Affiliation: Touro University California Address: 1310 Club Drive, Vallejo State, Province or County: California Postal Code: 94592 Country: USA Phone: 415.480.5842 Email: carinne.brody@gmail.com</p>
<p>Co-author There should be at least one co-author</p>	<p>Name: Megan Dunbar Affiliation: Pangea Global AIDS Foundation Country: USA</p>
<p>Co-author If applicable</p>	<p>Name: Shari Dworkin Affiliation: University of California, San Francisco Country: USA</p>
<p>Co-author If applicable</p>	<p>Name: Esther Mwaura-Muiri Wanjiku Affiliation: GROOTS Country: Kenya</p>
<p>Co-author If applicable</p>	<p>Name: Laura Pascoe Affiliation: University of California, Davis Country: USA</p>

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Please give brief description of content and methodological expertise within the review team. It is recommended to have at least one person on the review team who has content expertise, at least one person who has methodological expertise and at least one person who has statistical expertise. It is also recommended to have one person with information retrieval expertise. Please note that this is the *recommended optimal* review team composition.

- Content:

Dr. Brody will take the lead on the content of the review. She was the project coordinator for the development of the University of California Global Health Institute's (UCGHI) Center of Expertise on Women's Health and Empowerment. She has also recently conducted research on the impact of reproductive health voucher programs on women's empowerment in Cambodia.

Dr. Dworkin will provide guidance on the conceptualization of the review question. Her research at both the University of California, San Francisco and as the co-director of research for the UCGHI Center of Expertise on Women's Health and Empowerment focuses on gender relations, women's empowerment, violence, and HIV risk in developing countries.

Dr. Dunbar will also provide input on the content area and the specific inclusion/exclusion criteria for the review. Her particular expertise is in designing and evaluating interventions that address the social and economic factors that increase HIV vulnerability, such as gender-based violence and inequities in educational and economic opportunities for girls and women in developing countries.

Esther Wanjiku will offer a unique perspective during the design phase of this project. She has worked extensively with women's self-help groups in Kenya and throughout the developing world with the goal of strengthening women's participation in the development of communities and their approaches to problem solving.

Laura Pascoe's research has mainly focused on gender dynamics in development, specifically on engaging men in community-based gender justice-related work as a means of facilitating women's empowerment, as well as from policy analysis and ethnographic research that critiques the gender inequitable structures that tend to dictate sexual and reproductive health. Much of this work has been conducted in collaboration with Sonke Gender Justice in South Africa.

- Systematic review methods:

Dr. Brody was the lead analyst on a systematic review awarded during the first round of 3ie funding on the evidence for health vouchers, which was published by DFID and presented at the 2010 NONIE conference in Paris. She has conducted several other systematic reviews on reproductive health topics such as family planning access and global reproductive health funding

mechanisms for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. In addition, she has conducted several mixed methods studies - experiences that will be useful when designing and executing this mixed-methods review.

Dr. Dworkin, in her role as research co-director for the UC Global Health Institute Center of Expertise on Women's Empowerment and Health, is carrying out systematic reviews on the link between empowerment and numerous health outcomes and facilitating scientific collaborative research efforts at the intersection of women's empowerment and health. She was also the lead researcher for two systematic reviews on microfinance and health for the Centers for Disease Control in 2012.

Dr. Dunbar has served as principal investigator on federally and privately funded research projects, and has a vast experience with conducting literature reviews, including systematic review, on topics related to HIV, women and women's empowerment, and interventions to address these topics. Dr. Dunbar also serves as a lecturer within the University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health, and in 2010-2011 co-facilitated the 1st year DrPH research seminar teaching a three-part session on systematic reviews for entering doctoral students.

Laura Pascoe worked on a systematic review of Electronic Medical Records and their use in clinic and hospitals settings for FamilyPACT, California's innovative approach to provide comprehensive family planning services to eligible low-income men and women. Laura was also engaged in the process of designing a systematic review on programs that engage men and boys in sexual and reproductive health.

- Statistical analysis:

Dr. Brody and Dr. Dunbar will lead in developing the statistical approach to synthesizing the evidence. Dr. Brody has experience with data analysis and familiarity with numerous statistical packages.

- Information retrieval:

Dr. Brody will lead the information retrieval process. She has access to both University of California, Berkeley and Touro University libraries.

Laura will support the information retrieval process and has access to the University of California, Davis library.

Dr. Dworkin can provide access to the University of California, San Francisco library.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

For example, have any of the authors been involved in the development of relevant interventions, primary research, or prior published reviews on the topic?

We all have participated in research that is related to this research question in some way, but if any publications from our own work are determined to be eligible for inclusion in the study, we will have an independent evaluator assess the quality of the study.

SUPPORT

Do you need support in any of these areas: methodology and causal inference, systematic searches, coding, statistical analysis (meta-analysis)?

At this time, we do not need any additional support.

FUNDING

Do you receive any financial support, and if so, from where? What are your deliverable deadlines for the review? If not, are you planning to apply for funding, and if so, from where?

We have just been selected for an award of funds by 3ie Systematic Review Round 4. Our proposed deliverable deadlines are as follows:

Title *	15/06/2012
Draft protocol *	07/09/2012
Draft report *	18/12/2012
Final report *	30/03/2013
Policy brief and short summary *	30/03/2013

PRELIMINARY TIMEFRAME

Note, if the protocol or review are not submitted within 6 months and 18 months of title registration, respectively, the review area is opened up for other reviewers.

- Date you plan to submit a draft protocol: September 7, 2012
- Date you plan to submit a draft review: December 18, 2012

DECLARATION

Authors' responsibilities

By completing this form, you accept responsibility for preparing, maintaining and updating the review in accordance with Campbell Collaboration policy. The Campbell International Development Group will provide as much support as possible to assist with the preparation of the review.

A draft protocol must be submitted to the Group within six months. If drafts are not submitted before the agreed deadlines, or if we are unable to contact

you for an extended period, the Group has the right to de-register the title or transfer the title to alternative authors. The Group also has the right to de-register or transfer the title if it does not meet the standards of the Group and/or the Campbell Collaboration.

You accept responsibility for maintaining the review in light of new evidence, comments and criticisms, and other developments, and updating the review at least once every three years, or, if requested, transferring responsibility for maintaining the review to others as agreed with the Group.

Publication in the Campbell Library

The support of the International Development Group in preparing your review is conditional upon your agreement to publish the protocol, finished review and subsequent updates in the Campbell Library. Concurrent publication in other journals is encouraged. However, a Campbell systematic review should be published either before, or at the same time as, its publication in other journals. Authors should not publish Campbell reviews in journals before they are ready for publication in CL. Authors should remember to include the statement: "This is a version of a Campbell review, which is available in The Campbell Library".

I understand the commitment required to undertake a Campbell review, and agree to publish in the Campbell Library. Signed on behalf of the authors:

Form completed by:

Date:

Carinne Brody, DrPH

May 9, 2012

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