Empowerment of Women under Financial Inclusion

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Abstract

The power and efficiency of women coming together, in their collective voice, is a social and economic transformer and a fundamental enabler of rights, growth and development (Hendricks; 2019). For an emerging economy like India to develop and grow, it becomes very important that we take into account the contribution of women in the economy and not consider their income and stability to be an emergency option. The paper focuses on studying the financial inclusion schemes that were implemented in India after 2014 which help women in particular, to study the impact of the policies on the process of inclusion of women in the economy, to analyze how the factors of women empowerment already existing due to the policies are providing a boost to the overall financial inclusion and to study the socio-economic impacts for women due to the implication and the boost. The study employs secondary quantitative data for the years 2016 and 2021 that were extracted from NFHS reports. The Financial Inclusion of women is the dependent variable. Social and economic empowerment determinants are the independent variables. The study shows that there is a significant impact of (Asst) women owning assets (house or land), (DFL) women having mobile phones on their access to financial institutions (FIB).

Keywords: Financial Inclusion policies for women; Women's empowerment; Boost to Inclusion Policies; Multiple linear regression.

Introduction

"There is no tool for development more effective than women empowerment." -Dr Kofi Annan

The World Bank defines 'Financial Inclusion" as a tool that allows individuals to have access to financial products and services that meet their needs - payments, transactions, credit, saving and insurance - delivered in a sustainable way. Opening a bank account is only one aspect of financial inclusion. Individuals who are banked may not receive financial services (Ranjani, K.S.; Bapat, Varadraj; January 2015). "Financial Inclusion" became a topic of considerable national concern, after a three-day international conference on "Finance for

Development" hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July 2015. The term had gained mass importance from the year 2000, when, the factor of 'financial exclusion' came into focus along with its relation to poverty, as per the World Bank.

Although, the process of financial inclusion was a part of the goal of the Indian Government since the 1950s. It was in 2004, that the Khan Commission, created by the Reserve Bank of India, investigated the status of financial inclusion in India and then pointed out a series of recommendations for the Government to follow.

Figure 1.1: Distribution of account ownership rates across the world



Source: Global Findex Data 2021

As global account ownership in South Asia increased from 51% to 76% between 20111 and 2021, India, as one of the fastest growing nations, has made significant progress in the field of financial inclusion and inclusive growth, with new financial policies under the Government of India, after 2014. Since the nationalization of banks in 1964, India's laws and powerful banking system have placed a high priority on the country's inclusive growth. With financial inclusion becoming a prime objective for the nation, there were several research bodies collecting data to mark the progress. In 2013, the Finance Minister of India, P. Chidambaram, launched the CRISIL Inclusix to measure the status of progress. CRISIL now publishes semi-frequent reports, which have district-wise and state-wise data on the progress of the financial inclusion process in India. Some of

the key findings of the CRISIL report of 2018 were:

- a) As of April 2016, the overall India CRISIL Inclusix score was 58.0, which is above average and a substantial improvement from the 35.4 scores from 2009.
- b) The top three states showing significant growth were Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka.
- c) The main factor promoting financial inclusion is bank penetration; there are 1646 million more deposit accounts than credit accounts. (196 million) (CRISIL; 2018).

Figure 1.2: Growth of account ownership in South Asian region between 2011 and 2021

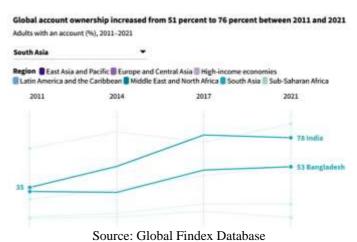
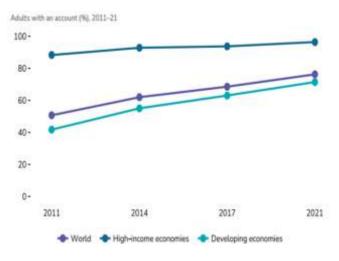


Figure 1.3: Comparison of account ownership of High income and Emerging economies



Source: Global Findex Database 2021

A major contribution, in India, towards this significant progress was due to the various schemes that have been launched since the 2014 Government came to power, for women of the state and the nation, for their benefit, to add to their rights, voices and hold on the household and the economy. We have schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) for women and all sections of society,

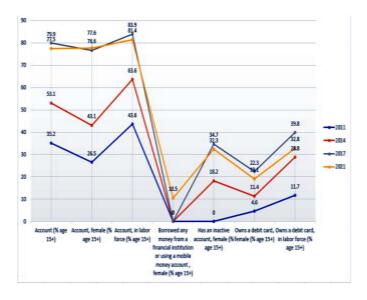
Oriental Mahila Vikas Yojana, the Kalyani Scheme and many more. The primary focus of these women-centric schemes was to make sure of the fact that women get equal opportunities in terms of financial autonomy and decision-making, to provide access to the banking structures to the unbanked.

Table 1.1: Year-wise data of India on FI parameters (figures in %)

Parameter	2011	2014	2017	2021
Account (% age 15+)	35.2	53.1	79.9	77.5
Account, female (% age 15+)	26.5	43.1	76.6	77.6
Account, in labour force (% age 15+)	43.6	63.6	83.9	81.4
Borrowed any money from a financial institution or using a mobile money account, female (% age 15+)				10.5
Has an inactive account, female (% age 15+)		18.2	34.7	32.3
Owns a debit card, female (% age 15+)	4.6	11.4	22.3	19.1
Owns a debit card, in labour force (% age 15+)	11.7	28.8	39.8	32.8

Source: Global Financial Inclusion

Figure 1.4: Fluctuations in India over the years for Financial Inclusion parameters



Source: Author's own picturization

The 2019 reports of Women's World Banking mentions the 2017 Global FINDEX report for India that shows that the 'Gender Gap' in ownership of accounts has incredibly reduced from 20% in 2014 to 6% in 2017 by the introduction of the schemes of inclusive growth by the Government, which accounted to 76.6% of women in records to have their own bank accounts now. The NFHS reports also show an improvement in women empowerment, from NFHS - 4 to NFHS - 5, from financial control access.

However, the other side of this success story is pretty different records almost half of these accounts are held by women, i.e a share of 32.3% of these accounts are inactive, as per the 2021 record, which showed a slight dip from 34.7% as recorded in 2017 (Global FINDEX). As per the census data of 2011, there are 58,64,69,174 women in India among which in 2017 still 23% of them were financially excluded to approximately still 134,887,910 of the women

have no access to basic financial services as compared to their male counterparts. Accounts made under the obligation of the Government are not used by the women and are lying idle or are used by the men in the household, which implies that the motive is not getting fulfilled, as the recorded number in the 2019 Women's World Bank report notes 278 million women in India to be either unbanked or have inactive accounts. Even the data of the World Bank shows records proving the same.

With the idea of financial inclusion being at the forefront of the liberation of women in many aspects of society, the effectiveness of the schemes has varied nationwide. We have schemes like the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh Loan Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and many others. All these schemes, either way or the other have initiated the opening of bank accounts for women and ensured their entry into the financial sector. As per a Consulting firm MicroSave Consulting (MSC), the PMJDY alone rose the number of bank accounts from 43% in 2014 to 77% in 2017.

After this initiation, despite this success, the scenario stands different. A research report by NITI AAYOG says that although the number of new accounts of women has expanded, 42% of these accounts are dormant. Quoting the 2017 FINDEX report, 65% of these accounts have not been used since a year after opening those accounts. However, keeping the gap in mind, there has been significant progress in the level of social and financial empowerment of women, as the record shows, from 2014 to 2022.

The financial inclusion policies have brought in women's empowerment, which has evidently changed the socioeconomic perspective of men and women in society and the outlook towards women. There has been a lack of study on the changes in the rates of the Gender Gap in terms of the process of Financial Inclusion, and how much have the implemented policies helped in the progression of empowerment for women in terms of ownership of assets by women, participation in household decision making, etc between the time period 2016 to 2021 as per the NFHS 4 and 5 report. Adding to it, there is a gap in research about evidence of whether the women empowerment factors which have seen signs of progress due to the FI policies are

indirectly giving a boost to a higher rate of financial inclusion for women in the economy.

Research Methodology

Objectives of study

- 1. To study the various financial inclusion policies for women launched by the Government of India.
- 2. To study the impact of the FI policies on the process of inclusion of women in the economy and in terms of empowerment.
- 3. To analyze how the factors of women empowerment already existing due to the policies are providing a boost to overall financial inclusion.
- 4. To study the socio-economic impacts for women considering the implication and its boost.

Dimensions of variables taken into study

Empowerment, being a multidimensional process, needs determinants from various aspects, while measuring or quantifying the same, for the society and the world to act on the progress of variables they term to be important for them (Page and Czuba, 1999). The framework of this study deals with the variables related to Social Empowerment and Financial or Economic empowerment, to determine the progress and effect of the Financial Inclusion schemes on the process of providing financial inclusion and empowerment to females in India.

Economic Empowerment: The ability to contribute to growth processes in a way that recognises the worth of their work and ensures a just distribution of their wealth to increase access to economic resources is recognised as economic empowerment. In a study by Mazumder et. al (2019), the change in women's empowerment was checked through qualitative techniques that quantified economic empowerment making use of the following criteria: decision-making at the household level, financial/economic security, resource control, say/control in familial decisions, legal awareness, and mobility. Similar variables were taken into consideration in the research by Bhatia, S, and Singh, S.(2019).

Social Empowerment: Giving someone the ability to better their standard of living is known as social empowerment.

Social adaptability, interpersonal contact, and correspondence contribute to women's empowerment (Swain and Wallentin, 2009). Social pressure could change a woman's ability to make decisions for her family. Economic empowerment includes financial literacy, which provides the knowledge and skills to manage financial prosperity, economic freedom, and responsibility for finances (Postmus, Plummer, McMahon, & Zurlo, 2013). However, the parameters of women's empowerment are highly interconnected and cannot be secluded.

Data Source and Variables

The study focuses on secondary quantitative data populated from India for the periods 2016 and 2021. The reports recorded by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) are

being used to extract the data for the study. The survey covered 707 districts and 6,10,000 households to collect the data through questionnaires. The study has the variables of women having banking/savings accounts that they use by themselves, women owning a house (assets - alone/jointly), women having mobile phones they use themselves (digital financial inclusion and literacy) and married women who take part in their household decision making.

The model of multiple linear regression is implemented for each year to study and assess the relationship between independent and dependent variables. It helps to determine the impact of a different independent variable(s) on dependent variables and how this impact varied between 2016 and 2021. (Sharma, Chaudhuri and Kashyap; 2022)

Table 3.1: Dependent and independent variables for Multiple Linear Regression model

Independent variable(s)	 a) Women owning a house (assets - alone/jointly) b) Women having mobile phones they use themselves c) Married women who take part in their household decision making
Dependent variable	a) Women having banking/savings accounts that they use by themselves

Empirical model

The NFHS 4 (2016) and NFHS 5 (2021) data is used to run on the model:

$$FIB_i = (\) + (\ _i)(Asst)_i + (\ _2)(DFL)_i + (\ _3)(HDM)_i$$

Where, = constant; Asst = women owning assets (jointly or alone), for the current study the parameter is considered to be a house; DFL = women owning mobile phones which they use themselves (digital financial literacy and access); HDM = married women who take part in their household decision making.

The proxies to measure independence in terms of economic independence and digital access by females are women owning a house or a land (Asst) and women having mobile phones which they use themselves (DFL). The proxy to measure women's empowerment is female participation in household decision-making (HDM) (Sharma, Chaudhuri and Kashyap; 2022). In the model, the determinants of measuring economic interdependence and digital access, that is. Women owning assets (Asst) and women having

mobile phones which they use themselves (DFL) are the independent variables. The measure of social empowerment, married women taking household decisions (HDM), is also taken as an independent variable. The dependent variable is the number of bank (savings) accounts that women use themselves, which is the variable of Financial Inclusion (FIB), in the model.

Analysis And Findings

Using the Linear Regression model, the dependent variable Financial Inclusion of women through the number of bank (savings) account they own and use themselves (FIB) is regressed on women owning assets (asst), women having mobile phones which they use themselves (DFL) and married women taking household decisions (HDM), which are the independent variables.

In the model, Breusch–Pagan test has also been used to measure heteroscedasticity.

Fig 3.1: Linear regression for the year 2016

. regress womenhavingabanksavingsaccountth ownershipofassetswomen womensparticipationinhouseholdde womenhavingdigi > talaccess

	Source	SS	άf	MS	Number of obs	:	36
-					F(3, 32)	=	5.81
	Model	5317.15898	3	1772.38633	Prob > F	=	0.0028
	Residual	5770.0511	32	305.315347	l-squared	=	0.3524
_					Adj R-squared	=	0.2517
	Total	15087.2501	35	431.064288	Noot MSE	:	17.473

womenhavingshanksavingsaccountth	Coef.	Std. Brr.	t	Þ t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
ownerskipofassetsvomen womensparticipationinkouseholdde womenhavingdigitalaccess _cons	1041325 .5759475		-0.12 2.44	0.902 0.021	.1756267 -1.884756 .8945721 -137.4869	.9132616 1.596491 1.057323 146.0552

. hettest

Breusch-Pagum / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity

Ho: Constant variance

Warriables: fitted values of womenhavingshanksavingsaccountth

chi2(1) = 0.33 Frob > chi2 = 0.5647

. vif

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
womenspart~e womenhavin~s ownershipo~n	1.48 1.46 1.01	0.677077 0.682796 0.988092
Mean VIF	1.32	

Source: Author's calculation from NFHS 4

Fig 3.2: Linear regression for the year 2021

. regress womenhavingabanksavings account th ownership of assets women women sparticipation inhousehold de womenhaving digit \geq talaccess

Source	33	df	MS	Number of obs = 36
Model	6630.60019	3	2210.20006	F(3, 32) = 8.00 Prob > F = 0.0004
Residual	8835.39981	32	276.106244	R-squared = 0.4287
Total	15466	35	441.885714	Adj R-squared = 0.3752 Root HSE = 16.616

womenhavingabanksavingsaccountth	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	Þ t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
ownershipofassetswomen	.5886017	.1711663	3.44	0.002	.2399474	.9372559
womensparticipationinhouseholdde	3173937	.1609592	-1.97	0.057	6452568	.0104695
womenhavingdigitalaccess	.4866417	.1897394	2.56	0.015	.1001553	.8731281
cons	17.12475	17.94584	0.95	0.347	-19.42974	53.67924

. hettest

Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity

Ho: Constant variance

Variables: fitted values of womenhavingabanksavingsaccountth

chi2(1) = 0.41 Prob > chi2 = 0.5196

. vif

IF 1/V	VIF	Variable
04 0.9578	1.05 1.04 1.01	womenspart~e womenhavin~s ownershipo~n
03	1.03	Mean VIF

Source: Author's calculation from NFHS 5

Figure 3.1 shows the linear regression between dependent variables and independent variables for all the states and union territories for the year 2016, taken from the NFHS 4 dataset. The value of Prob>F is 0.0028 which means that the model is significant at 99%. Figure 3.2 shows the linear regression between dependent variables and independent variables for all the states and union territories for the year 2021, taken from the NFHS 5 dataset. The value of Prob>F is 0.0004 which means that the model is significant at 99%.

In 2016: $FIB_i = (0.54)(Asst)_i + (0.57)(DFL)_i + (-0.10)(HDM)_i$ In 2021: $FIB_i = (0.58)(Asst)_i + (0.48)(DFL)_i + (-0.31)(HDM)_i$

Ownership of assets: Figure 3.1 shows that in the year 2016, the independent variable: ownership of assets (Asst) had a significant positive impact on FIB. The coefficient of asst is 0.54, which means that there is a 0.54 increase in FIB due a unit increase in Asst. In Figure 3.2, in the year 2021, ownership of assets (Asst) has a significant positive impact on FIB. The coefficient of asst is 0.58, which means that there is a 0.58 increase in FIB due to a unit increase in Asst respectively. Women's demand for the use of financial services is significantly influenced by their status as landowners (Balasubramanian and Natarajan; 2019). The findings demonstrate that women who own land on their own have a substantial association with formal account ownership.

Women having mobile phones which they use themselves: In 2016, DFL had a significant positive impact on FIB. The coefficient of DFL is 0.57, which means that there is a 0.57 increase in FIB due to a unit increase in DFL. In the year 2021, the results show that DFL again has a significant positive impact on FIB, which means that there is a 0.48 increase in FIB due to a unit increase in DFL. The results indicate that the socio-economic factor of owning mobile phones for females themselves has a significant influence on the process of digital financial inclusion and hence in achieving the target of female financial inclusion (Ali and Ghildiyal; 2023). The results show that mobile phones have become important financial service delivery tools and are helping in promoting the financial inclusion process.

Female participation in household decision-making: The results for the year 2016 show that HDM had an insignificant impact on FIB. The coefficient of HDM is (-

0.10), which means that there is a negative relationship between HDM and FIB, that is, (-0.10) increase or decrease in FIB due to a unit decrease or increase in HDM. In the year 2021, it shows that HDM had a significant negative impact on FIB. The coefficient of HDM is (-0.31), which means that there is a (-0.31) increase or decrease in FIB due to a unit decrease or increase in HDM. The change of significance in the variable is a result of the gradual effect of the Financial Inclusion policies launched by the Government, due to which the impact of HDM is significant on FIB in the results of the year 2021.

The null hypothesis, while checking for heteroscedasticity through Breusch–Pagan test, was taken to be:

 $H_0 = Constant variance.$

In the 2016 NFHS-4 data, Prob > chi2 = 0.56, which means the variance of the errors from the regression model is not dependent on the values of the independent variables. Hence, the model is homoscedastic. The variables, both dependent and independent, were checked for multicollinearity, where for 2016, the VIF value is 1.32, which means there is no multicollinearity present in the model. In the 2021 NFHS-5 data, Prob > chi2 = 0.51, which means the variance of the errors from the regression model is not dependent on the values of the independent variables. Hence, the model is homoscedastic. The variables, both dependent and independent, were checked for multicollinearity, where for 2021, the VIF value is 1.03, which means there is no multicollinearity present in the model.

Conclusion

The study has evaluated the social and economic empowerment factors and their relation with the progress of Financial Inclusion of women in India under the following schemes: Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Stand Up India Scheme, by taking data of every state and union territory from NFHS 4 and NFHS 5. The Financial Inclusion Policies taken into the study were the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and Stand Up India Scheme. The scheme of PMJDY was launched with the motive of widespread penetration of financial services

into the mass of India so that all citizens have access to the banking system. This turned out to be a boon for women, as it became one of the major financial inclusion policies for financial inclusion, where as of March 2023, 27 crore females have opened their accounts under the scheme and hence leading to women's empowerment socially and economically. The scheme helped open a total of 42.20 crore new bank accounts in 2021 for various financial purposes, hence marking the significant success of the scheme (Singh and Naik, 2018). Respondents, particularly women, with little or no formal education could open PMJDY accounts hassle-free. There was a general lack of knowledge about these financial schemes, but banks, SHGs, and BCs have become more crucial in the opening of PMJDY accounts (Singh and Naik, 2018).

The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana was not focused solely on women. However, it gave a significant boost to the ST, SC and women in the non-farming sector as they would get loans for growing or developing their small businesses and industries. The study says that during FY 2021-22, loans of Rs. 3.39 lakh crores were sanctioned under the scheme to 5.37 crore loan accounts, where 49% of the sanctioned loans were predominantly for women, for which women had to open bank accounts to get the sanctions for their business (PMMY Annual Report 2021). Digital financial literacy was also promoted through the schemes, as mobile phones and the concept of mobile banking were necessary to stay updated about their loan interests and perks. The Shishu category showed the most significant outcome as the MFIs preferred to give microloans specifically to females. PMMY was not able to penetrate much in rural India, however, it could provide a solution for financial inclusion to urban women (Singh and Naik, 2018).

The Stand Up Scheme was also one of the major policies introduced for the economic empowerment of women and minorities, who were entrepreneurs. The scheme showed a huge success rate in the number of women applicants, who applied for the loans and in due course opened new bank accounts for the same. The recorded numbers in 2022 showed 108250 female beneficiaries (Ministry of Finance and PIB, April 2022) who got loans sanctioned for Rs. 24809.89 crores. All the schemes were phenomenal

approaches for the upliftment of the female class, where through the schemes women could find a way to improve their social and economic status in society and become financially independent. When a woman in India has a bank account, it serves as more than just an account; it also serves as a status symbol for her confidence, independence, financial maturity, and responsibility (Pal et al; 2021).

In the study financial inclusion for women is being measured with the banking penetration for women in the society, where the variable taken is women having a bank or savings account that they use themself (FIB), where the purpose of using the bank accounts could vary from the perspective of the individual (NABARD AND ICRIER report; Sept 2022). The prime factors of empowerment for women were taken to be: (Asst) women owning a house or land (asset), alone/jointly(Sharma, Chaudhuri and Kashyap; 2022) and (DFL) women having mobile phones which they use themselves (NABARD AND ICRIER report; Sept 2022), which are factors of economic empowerment and (HDM) female participation in household decision making (Bhatai, S, and Singh S, 2019), which comes under social empowerment of women.

With the inception of the policies under study in 2014, there has been significant growth in the number of bank or savings accounts that were opened in the name of women and are used just by them (NFHS 4 & NFHS 5). The progress was noticed in the NFHS 5 survey, where the empowerment determinants (Table 3.2) showed noticeable changes in the dimension of women's empowerment. From the country-level data, the study shows that there is a clear relationship between (Asst) women owning assets (house or land) and their access to financial institutions (FIB), which affects the need to have a bank account significantly (Balasubramanian and Natarajan: 2019). Over time, as observed from 2016 to 2021, the impact of Asst has also increased on FIB, with the implementation of the schemes taken under study where either of the schemes have benefitted females in utilizing their lands or assets efficiently and achieving independence. Women should be encouraged to own, occupy, and use their land in emerging nations both for private use and for business endeavours and policies that support women owning land should be

strengthened more (FAO, 2010). Given that women are crucial to the development of economies in emerging nations, formal institutions must be more open to their needs for financing.

The study recognizes a significant relationship between (DFL) women having mobile phones which they use themselves and their access to financial institutions (FIB), that is, having a bank account significantly. With the introduction of the Financial Inclusion policies, the access of women to mobile phones, which they use for themselves has increased, as seen between 2016 to 2021. (NFHS 4 & NFHS 5). Fewer women can open phone-based bank accounts in their names if they don't own mobile phones, which limits their access to various digital financial services including sending or receiving money transfers, getting credit, paying bills, and making decisions about their use (Kes et. al; 2017). This significant relationship has been established because, with the policies coming into action, women wanted to make use of it for their empowerment, stability and independence, hence they should have access to digital media, which means mobile phones, to have access to the banking services made available to them along with its digital services. There is another important factor, (HDM) women's participation in household decision-making, which in the current study, established an insignificant relationship with FIB, in 2016. In the 2021 survey of NFHS 5, HDM turned out to have established a significant negative relationship with FIB (Figure 3.2). In the NFHS survey, household decisionmaking is divided into five prime decisions: major household purchases, purchases of daily household needs, visits to the wife's family or relatives, what to do with the income the wife and how many children to have. In the NFHS 5 survey, it was seen that in terms of all five decisions, there had been a noticeable drop in the numbers of the attitude towards wife's decision-making in the household. This drop has been noticed in terms of both urban and rural households, and in nuclear and non-nuclear households and hence does not provide a positive boost to the process of FIB.(NFHS 5)

India, being an emerging economy, has achieved success in the context of financial inclusion for women through the various policies that the Government has implemented, reaching a rate of 77.6 % of the women who are above 15+ age having a bank account of their own, in 2021 (Global FINDEX 2021) from 43.1% in the year 2014. However, the economy still has the highest number of inactive bank accounts as per the Global Financial Index Report 2021 which stands at 32.3 %. For the long-term development and sustainability of the economy, the Government should come up with more schemes and policies which are consumer-friendly for women to benefit from them as financial inclusion of women can have a transformational impact on the society and economy (Hendricks; 2019). The limitation in the study is the non-continuity of data, as the NFHS surveys are done every 5 years, adding to which NFHS is the only source with detailed survey reports on the factors of women empowerment and its impacting variables. The HDM variable showed an insignificant impact on FIB in the year 2016, and a significant negative impact in 2021. The paper recommends further study on what is the relationship between FIB and HDM and why the significance is getting impacted by the rise in financial inclusion of women in the economy. Including women in the financial economy does not only mean empowerment, social upliftment and independence but also brings growth to the economy. More inclusive policies should be framed for women which would help them to bring in their efficiency in order to achieve the desired growth and development along with social welfare (Gates; 2014), both internally and externally in an emerging market economy like India, with women as the 'agents of change' for any nation.

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