

Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Finance: An Empirical Analysis of Working Women's Literacy in Kolkata

Dr. Juin Ghosh Sarkar

Associate Professor, Head of the Department – Management Science, MCKV Institute of Engineering

ABSTRACT

Financial literacy has secured an indispensable role in the current scenario throughout the years due to the development of the new financial products, intricacy of the financial markets, information heterogeneity and changes in the economic factors. To understand, explore and to make use of the sophisticated financial products in the emerging financial markets, there is a need for every individual to have adequate financial literacy. In India where there are people who live on meagre income and strive hard to meet the two ends, there is immense need to maintain funds, manage them and save them for bad times. Women play a diversified role in daily life. From managing the household chores to monthly financial contributor as well as the role of manager of family income. Thus, there emerges the need to understand financial terms and conditions. So, financial awareness and proper idea about managing the finance turns out to be a prerequisite for each and every women in today's world. This paper emphasizes on the financial understanding, awareness, inclusion among working women of Kolkata and their capability to manage the finance. It also focuses on their ability for financial analysis of risk and return, terms and policies for better management of funds.

Keywords: Financial Literacy, Financial Inclusion, Working Women.

INTRODUCTION

Financial awareness is the ability to effectively understand, manage a variety of financial activities taking into consideration risk and return analysis, personal finance management, budgeting, and investing. Financial investments and services have recently become widespread among people of all economic backgrounds. Women in the Indian society plays a pivotal role both in the workplace as well as at home, where she turns out to be the regular financial planner. So, basic financial awareness is needed to execute the plans aptly. Financial inclusion means that individuals and organisations have access to useful and affordable financial services and products that full fill their needs, which includes transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance that is delivered in a responsible and sustainable way. Key barriers to economic opportunities include restrictions on freedom of movement and access to financial services, formal employment and social protection. The Covid-19 global endemic presents an opportunity for renewed attention to an extensive and inclusive approach to women's economic empowerment, rebuilding economies by prioritising the right to safe and decent economic opportunities, financial inclusion, social networks and protection and above all gender equality. According to a survey conducted by National Centre for Financial Education in 2025, the level of financial literacy in India is the lowest 27% among

all the BRICS Nations which is significantly low compared to the global average of 42%. The low level of Financial Literacy especially amongst the women points out on the need for increased awareness and education. In India, people save more than they spend, and women plan, budget and maintain funds for the household expenses throughout the year. Like other countries the gender gap also prevails in India, the financial illiteracy rate in the country is wider with 73% men and 80% women who are most likely to give incorrect answers regarding financial decisions. As per reports published by RBI, though the general literacy rate is 77% but the financial literacy rate is 35% in India which is quite alarming compared to the global standard.

Pertinence of Financial Education, Financial Literacy and Inclusion in the Contemporary World

The importance of financial education irrespective of gender, cannot be overruled in the era of global integrated financial market. The pertinence of financial education are as follows:

- Financial literacy and education are very important parameters to emerging economies as it endeavors to improve the financial situation of the national citizens for accelerating the higher economic growth rates.
- Strengthening the financial literacy would boost up the financial wellbeing of the people as it will enable them to make sound and rational financial decision.
- Financial education also empowers the people to thoroughly analyse the various perspectives regarding the evaluation of various alternatives at the time of making financial investment.
- This education will accredit the people to properly recognize the risk and return related to fund investment in different financial products.
- Financial Education also offers employment opportunities throughout the globe.
- The twin pillars for Inclusive Growth are Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion. Financial Literacy acts as the demand to make people aware and decide about the investments whereas Financial Inclusion aims to provide the basic and ancillary services, which can be done only by improving the Financial Literacy.
- Literacy in the area of finance develops a specialised skill which builds up the confidence to manage and handle their finances and other contingencies more aptly.
- Financial Literacy will enable the people to take correct decision regarding investment of their hard earned savings.
- The dominant demographic parameters that affects the Financial Literacy are – Gender, Age, Educational Qualification, Residential Location, Monthly Income and Mode of Employment.
- The role of regularity authority towards improvement of Financial Education cannot be overlooked. The various agencies and government bodies who help the nationals to educate proper financial management are – Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Commercial Banks, the Financial Education initiative taken by Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA), several programs initiated by Securities and Exchange Board of India to make the general public aware about the stock market, the social security messages spread by the latest regulatory body Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) also plays an important role.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is an integral part of any research work. So, to have an idea about the area covered on this particular domain area till date the researcher went through a plethora of literature both from national

as well as international arena. Pratap Singh et.al (2002) aimed to explore the distinction between male and female investors of Tamil Nadu stating the available amount for investment ranges between Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 1,00,000 per annum. Qamar (2003) attempted to examine the investment preferences of households who are able to save and to identify the factors influencing saving behavior and investment preferences of investors. The parameters taken into consideration to determine the saving and investment pattern are - level of literacy, educational achievement, occupational distribution and income profile of the respondents. Piprek et al. (2004) stated that basic financial judgment, discretion and literacy which includes understanding of terms like savings, credit, insurance and budgeting. Jeanne M. Hogarth (2006) provided a vivid picture of the current state of financial education in the US relating to community and economic development. The observation revealed that a financially educated consumer often helps an individual to make better financial decisions for their family thereby increasing the economic security and wellbeing. Raghavan Guruswami (2010) observed that in order to avoid financial exploitation, financial exclusion and financial discrimination – financial literacy has emerged as an important parameter for proper functioning in matured economies. Socially impoverished class of the people including the under privileged, uneducated, unemployed, poor, old, disabled population form the nucleus of the financial excluded population of the country. According to Murray (2010), it is a set of potentialities such as general literacy, problem solving ability, numerical ability applied to personal finance. Financial Literacy is absolutely relative to the socio-economic conditions of the people and is linked to their specific problem like exclusion. Agarwalla (2012) attempted to understand the financial literacy levels among the young working adults, retired and students in India. Beckmann (2013), used an internationally comparable measure of financial literacy and analysed its relation with the household savings of Romania. Vohra and Kaur (2017), deduced that Indian women mostly rely on the recommendations of the family mainly the male members of the family at the time of financial decision making. Since, majority of the Indian households are reluctant to involve the female counter parts of the family in the financial decision-making process.

RESEARCH GAP

While going through the rigorous procedure of literature review of the related topics both from national as well as international journals, it is observed that no such study has been carried out in Kolkata or West Bengal or even India till date where a thorough analysis of the financial literacy of the working women, their financial outlook, financial planning capacity and its impact is conducted. So, the main focus of this research paper is to analyse, understand and suggest about the financial literacy of the working women from meager income group of Kolkata.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of the study is to find out the financial literacy level among the working women of Kolkata. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To analyse the relation between age and level of financial literacy of the working women in Kolkata.
- To understand the impact of financial literacy on monthly expenses and savings along with their financial decisions.
- Suggestions to improve the level of financial literacy among the mentioned group.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper intends to analyse, understand and improve the financial literacy level of the working women of Kolkata. The geographic territory was restricted to Kolkata. A pilot study from the population were selected as per convenience sampling method (As per their availability and willingness).

As the exact population is unknown, so by applying the Krejcie and Morgan formula of sample size calculation for infinite (unknown) Population, we get

$$n = x^2 p (1-p) / d^2$$

$$n = (1.96)^2 \times 0.5 (1-0.5) / (0.1)^2 = 96.04 \text{ (Round of 100)}$$

Here x= 1.96 for 95% confidence level, P= 0.5 and d = 0.1

Though the calculation reveals that 100 sample size is enough for infinite population but for proper inference of entire population, sample size for the study considered was 225 consumers. Primary Information was collected with the help of well-structured Questionnaire along with personal interview. A well-structured objective type and probing questionnaire was prepared to investigate. The practical aspect, personal interview and observation technique was taken into consideration. Secondary data was collected from Published literature in Books, Magazines, Journals and Newspapers and websites. The information collected during data collection was generated, analysed and interpreted with the help of SPSS 20 software.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Reliability Test

Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of items
.823	.844	21

The Cronbach’s Alpha is applied to test the reliability of the questionnaire for survey by using Likert scale at the time of collecting the primary data. It is used to assess the reliability by comparing the amount of shared variance or covariance among the parameters. In this study the Cronbach’s Alpha is .823 (quite high compared to the acceptable limit of .70), indicates high level of internal consistency for the scale with this specific sample.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (working women in Kolkata)

Demographic Parameters	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18-30 years	76
	31-50 years	22
	Above 50 years	2
Marital Status	Married	82
	Unmarried	18
Educational Qualification	Under Graduate	43
	Graduate and above	57
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 25,000	84
	Above Rs. 25,000	16
Total	225	

The four demographic parameters that were taken into consideration for the study are as follows:

- **Age group:** The sample comprises of 170 i.e. 76% respondents who were in the age group of 18-30 years. Whereas only 50 respondents i.e. 22% of the total respondents were in the age bracket of 31-50 years. A negligible number of only 5 out of 225 of the total respondents i.e. merely 5% were aged above 50 years.
- **Marital Status:** Out of the total 225 respondents, 185 (i.e. 82%) were married and the remaining 18% amounting to 40 respondents were unmarried working women of Kolkata.
- **Educational Qualification:** 98 respondents i.e. 47% were under graduates and the remaining 57% i.e. a total of 127 respondents were at least Graduate working professionals of Kolkata.
- **Monthly Income:** 84% of the total respondents i.e. 190 working women had a monthly income less than Rs. 25,000, whereas, remaining 16% respondents had a monthly income more than Rs. 25,000. So from the available information it is observed that the survey focuses on the working women of Kolkata from indigent income group.

Table 3: Responses of Women towards their Attitude of Spending

Age Group	Consideration before spending				Attitude towards money management			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	0	150	20	0	0	170	0	0
	0%	88.24%	11.76%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
31-50 years	0	47	3	0	9	41	0	0
	0%	94%	6%	0%	18%	82%	0%	0%
Above 50 years	0	3	2	0	0	5	0	0
	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%

Table 3 reveals that out of 225 respondents, most of them overlook the positive and negative consequences before buying anything. Their only point of concern is the affordability of the product. In the survey 150 respondents i.e. 88.24% of the women belonging to the age group of 18-30 years disagreed about considering their affordability of the product before buying whereas, 11.76% of the respondents in that age group think otherwise. 100% of the respondents of this age group disagrees to live for the present overlooking the future. Hence, it can be deduced that though the respondents do not think much before spending on any product but they think for the future in the long run.

Table 4: Satisfaction and Attitude towards Savings

Age Group	Satisfaction towards saving money				Attitude towards present money spending			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	0	5	165	0	0	40	130	0
	0%	3%	97%	0%	0%	23.53%	76.47%	0%
31-50	0	7	43	0	0	35	15	0

years	0%	14%	86%	0%	0%	70%	30%	0%
Above	0	3	2	0	0	5	0	0
50	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
years								

Table 4 reflects that 97% of the respondents in the age group of 18-30 years agrees to the fact that they are more satisfied on saving money for their future rather than spending on valuables out of their meager income. Whereas, 86% of the respondents in the age group of 31-50 years feels the same. At the same time 76.47% of the respondents in the age group of 18-30 years agrees to the fact they earn to spend for a better livelihood, whereas only 30% women in the age group of 31-50 years feels the same. So, it may be deduced that the younger working women earn for a better livelihood. Whereas the mentality of the majority of elderly women totally different, as they totally disagree to the fact of present better livelihood.

Table 5: Response of women towards Spending Behaviour

Age Group	Balance between savings and expenditure				Level of drawings from account			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	0	21	149	0	0	169	1	0
	0%	12.35%	87.65%	0%	0%	99.41%	0.59%	0%
31-50 years	0	18	32	0	0	50	0	0
	0%	36%	64%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Above 50 years	0	3	2	0	0	5	0	0
	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%

Table 5 shows the response about the spending behavior of the working women of Kolkata. Most of the respondents agreed that they strike a balance between expenditure and savings. 87.65% of the respondents in the age group of 18-30 years agrees to spend within their limits compared to 64% women in the age group of 31-50 years and 40% above 50 years of age. The table also reveals that almost every working women of Kolkata irrespective of their age opines to spend within their limits i.e. they avoid to overspend or cross their available balance.

Table 6: Response of women towards Financial Planning

Age Group	Savings for unexpected crisis				Perception and management regarding forthcoming expenses			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	0	0	154	16	0	40	130	0
	0%	0%	90.59%	9.41%	0%	23.53%	76.47%	0%
31-50 years	0	0	30	20	0	8	42	0
	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%	16%	84%	0%

Above 50 years	0	0	2	3	0	0	5	0
	0%	0%	40%	60%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Table 6 reflects that 90.59% of the respondents are in the age group of 18-30 years to save enough to take care of the unexpected crisis whereas 60% of the respondents in the age group of 31-50 years feels the same compared to the 40% respondents above 50 years. The study also reveals that 76.47% in the age group of 18-30 years feel that they have good idea about their future expenses compared to 84% and 100% in the age group of 31-50 years and above 50 years respectively. Thereby we can conclude that the respondents of the survey are vigilant and are well aware of the savings to maintain a decent livelihood.

Table 7: Attitude towards Long term Financial Planning

Age Group	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	0	0	28	142
	0%	0%	16.47%	83.53%
31-50 years	0	0	48	2
	0%	0%	96%	4%
Above 50 years	0	0	2	3
	0%	0%	40%	60%

Table 7 shows that out of 170 respondents in the age group of 18-30 years 142 respondents and 60% of the respondents above 50 years of age strongly agree and 96% of the respondents in the age group of 31-50 years also agrees that they set financial goals and strictly follow them. The working women customize their plans to stick to their financial budgeting, which reveals that the working women in Kolkata are more or less aware about the importance of financial requirement.

Table 8: Response of women for Financial Wellbeing

Age Group	Confidence about Financial Decisions				Convenience towards Debts and Loan			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	120	50	0	0	135	35	0	0
	70.59%	29.41%	0%	0%	79.41%	20.59%	0%	0%
31-50 years	30	20	0	0	42	8	0	0
	60%	40%	0%	0%	84%	16%	0%	0%
Above 50 years	2	3	0	0	5	0	0	0
	40%	60%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%

Table 8 represents the working women are not aware or financial literate enough to deal with the present scenario. The study also reveals that the women are not at all confident of their financial decisions irrespective of age group, the respondents are not financial stable and are neither so confident in taking financial decision nor are comfortable about discussing financial debts and loan. It can be inferred that the

working women of Kolkata are neither confident about their financial decisions nor are they agreeable enough to discuss about loans and debts in front of others.

Table 9: Response on the Knowledge and Attitude about Financial Terms

Age Group	Knowledge about Financial Terms				Attitude towards Bank Dealings			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18-30 years	0	0	70	100	0	0	45	125
	0%	0%	41.18%	58.82%	0%	0%	26.47%	73.53%
31-50 years	0	0	10	40	2	0	10	38
	0%	0%	5%	95%	2%	0%	5%	76%
Above 50 years	0	0	3	2	0	0	0	5
	0%	0%	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Table 9 reveals that the women respondents regardless of their age are not comfortable while discussing financial terms and conditions because of lack of awareness on financial aspects. Majority of the working women are not confident enough or rather uncomfortable while dealing with the banks and financial institutions. The respondents lack their confidence regarding handling the financial matters single handedly as they not well aware about the financial terms.

CONCLUSIONS

In a male predominant society like India, most of the financial decisions are taken by the male members of the family irrespective of financial independence of the women. This study is conducted to find out the financial awareness of the working women of modest income group of Kolkata. The respondents of the survey are mostly working women of Kolkata who are not so educated and are the meager bread earners for their family. It has been observed through the study that the women are not very familiar to financial terms as well as management of funds and hesitate to take the final call, though they are competent enough to make their family budget and work accordingly.

The study of financial literacy among working women in Kolkata reveals significant insights into their understanding, behavior, and attitudes toward financial management. While a growing number of women in the city are financially independent and contribute actively to household income, gaps still persist in their financial knowledge, particularly in areas such as investment planning, retirement savings, taxation, and risk management.

The analysis indicates that factors such as age, education level, profession, and income play a crucial role in shaping financial literacy. Younger women and those with higher education and professional backgrounds tend to be more financially aware and confident in making financial decisions. However, many respondents still rely heavily on family members or spouses for financial planning, indicating a need for increased empowerment and targeted financial education.

Awareness programs, workplace financial seminars, and access to easy-to-understand financial tools can play a vital role in enhancing financial literacy among working women. Encouraging self-reliance in money matters is not only essential for personal security but also contributes to the broader goal of gender equality and economic development.

In conclusion, while progress is evident, a sustained effort by government agencies, financial institutions, NGOs, and employers is required to close the financial literacy gap and ensure that every working woman in Kolkata is equipped with the knowledge and confidence to manage her finances effectively.

SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests that working women need to possess basic idea about the financial terms and relevant investment schemes. The following suggestions are proposed to enhance awareness amongst the working women in Kolkata:

- Financial literacy should be included in school curriculum to make children aware from the very grass root level. Thereby resulting in dissemination of the topics to the elderly members of their family, creating awareness as a whole.
- Financial Literacy Workshops should be conducted to covering topics like budgeting, investing, retirement planning, and insurance to enhance employee satisfaction, reduce financial stress, and increase productivity. These workshops would enable the women to have in-depth knowledge about finance.
- HR policies should include flexible investment plans, maternity-related financial planning support, and counseling on long-term wealth management. Women most of the time face unique financial challenges (e.g., career breaks, lower pay, caregiving responsibilities) which may enable them to make informed financial decisions, contributing to retention and inclusivity.
- Banks and financial institutions can develop tailored savings plans, insurance packages, and investment tools specifically for women to increase financial inclusion and expand the customer base.
- To promote women's involvement in organizational budget discussions or financial committees to build up confidence, leadership, and long-term planning skills among women professionals.
- Competitions like poster making, street play may be practiced by the schools to create awareness amongst the mass.
- The Government may take an initiative to educate the mass by organizing a program named Financial Literacy Month through National Service Scheme (NSS).
- Educated NSS cadres may be appointed by financial institutions for short term to create awareness amongst the working women.
- The regulatory authorities should be proactive enough to educate the mass regarding proper financial management.
- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is expected to introduce more programs to disseminate the financial policies, information to enhance the financial literacy as a whole irrespective of gender.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

While analysing the Financial Literacy of the working women in Kolkata based on pilot survey, the following limitations have been observed:

- The survey was conducted in the metropolitan city of Kolkata and does not account for working women in suburban or rural areas of West Bengal or other parts of the country or globe, where financial literacy levels might differ significantly – the result of analysis may vary according to change in location.
- The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 18-30 years with a monthly income of less than Rs.25,000 and the analysis is totally based on their level of understanding and knowledge. Above

all the study was based on 225 working women of Kolkata, which may not represent the diversity of the entire population. A larger and more varied sample could provide a more comprehensive picture.

- The study relies heavily on self-reported data, which can be influenced by personal bias, misunderstanding of financial terms, or the tendency to respond in socially desirable ways.
- While the study considers the demographic factors like age, marital status, educational qualification and monthly income – it does not deeply explore cultural, psychological, or familial influences that may impact financial decision-making
- The study was conducted over a limited period, which restricted the ability to observe long-term financial behavior or changes in literacy over time.
- The research does not include a comparative analysis with men or women in other cities, which could have provided context and depth to the findings.

However, the results have been analysed authentically and presented to the best of our knowledge.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The study can be further used to compare the awareness level of the opposite gender or respondents of other cities. The impact of the financial literacy on employees' performance may also be taken into consideration. Such research work would encourage the Government bodies, NGOs and private institutions to collaborate to institutionalise financial education in workplaces and promote policies to create awareness on financial aspect and also organize special projects for the overall development of women. Researchers may conduct comparative studies across cities, sectors, or socioeconomic classes to identify best practices and evolving trends. There may be increased development of fintech applications designed specifically for women, with user-friendly interfaces, goal-based savings features, and educational content in regional languages. Financially aware women are more likely to educate their children and influence their partners, leading to broader societal shifts in financial behavior over time. As more women become financially literate, it could lead to greater financial autonomy, higher investment rates among women, and increased participation in entrepreneurial activities, thus contributing to local and national economic growth.

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