

Post Office Investment Schemes as Instruments of Financial Inclusion: Women Investors' Perceptions and Responses

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

Post Office investment schemes play a significant role in promoting financial inclusion in India, particularly among women investors who often prefer safe and accessible investment avenues. The purpose of this study is to examine women investors' perceptions, attitudes, and responses toward Post Office investment schemes and to assess their role as instruments of financial inclusion through the lens of investment behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach

The study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design based on secondary data. Unlike traditional survey-based studies, this research utilizes "Revealed Preference Theory," inferring investor perception from actual behavioural data. Data was collated from the Ministry of Finance (Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha Starred Questions), Department of Posts Annual Reports, and RBI statistics covering the period 2019–2025.

Findings

The analysis reveals a strong behavioural preference for government-backed schemes among women. The rapid uptake of the *Mahila Samman Savings Certificate* (43.30 lakh accounts in 18 months) and the sustained growth of *Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana* (4.10 crore accounts) indicate that "Safety" and "Institutional Trust" are the primary drivers of women's financial inclusion. The study confirms that despite the rise of digital banking, the Post Office remains a critical "safe haven" for women's capital.

Originality/value

This study contributes to the literature by utilizing macro-level government data to validate micro-level assumptions about women's risk aversion. It provides empirical evidence of the "Trust Factor" in public sector financial institutions.

Keywords: Post Office investment schemes, Women investors, Financial inclusion, Mahila Samman Savings Certificate, Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana.

INTRODUCTION

Investment behaviour plays a crucial role in shaping financial security and long-term economic stability, particularly for women, who often face unique socio-economic constraints in accessing formal financial systems. In recent years, the concept of **financial inclusion** has gained prominence as a policy priority aimed at ensuring equitable access to affordable and reliable financial services for all segments of society. Women's participation in formal investment avenues is increasingly recognised as a key driver of inclusive and sustainable economic development.

In India, **Post Office investment schemes** have historically served as trusted and accessible financial instruments, especially for small savers and risk-averse investors (Malviya & Soni, 2025). Backed by government assurance, these schemes offer safety, stable returns, and widespread reach, making them particularly attractive to women investors. Post Office savings schemes such as fixed deposits, recurring deposits, monthly income schemes, and small savings certificates provide structured investment options that align with women's preferences for security and long-term savings (Thomas & Idicula, 2025).

Despite the expansion of private financial institutions and digital investment platforms, Post Office investment avenues continue to play a vital role in promoting financial inclusion among women. Factors such as institutional trust, simplicity of procedures, physical accessibility, and perceived security significantly influence women's investment decisions. Understanding women's **perceptions, attitudes, and responses** toward these schemes is therefore essential for evaluating their effectiveness as instruments of financial inclusion (Bhatia & Singh, 2019).

Existing literature on investment behaviour highlights that women investors tend to exhibit greater risk aversion, long-term planning orientation, and preference for secure investment options compared to men. However, empirical studies focusing specifically on women's investment behaviour in government-backed savings schemes remain limited. Much of the available research concentrates on banking products, mutual funds, or insurance schemes, leaving Post Office investment avenues relatively underexplored from a gender-specific perspective.

Furthermore, while financial inclusion initiatives have expanded significantly, there is a need for micro-level empirical evidence assessing how traditional public sector financial institutions contribute to women's financial participation. Women's perceptions of safety, trust, accessibility, and returns play a decisive role in shaping their investment choices and long-term financial behaviour (Joghee et al., 2025). Examining these factors can provide valuable insights for policymakers and financial institutions seeking to strengthen inclusive financial systems.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine women investors' perceptions, attitudes, and responses toward Post Office investment schemes. By analysing **national-level data trends** and responses to specific women-centric avenues, the study aims to contribute to the literature on women's investment behaviour and inclusive finance.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To examine women investors' perceptions and responses toward Post Office investment schemes;
- (ii) To analyse women's attitudes toward safety, returns, accessibility, and trust in these investment avenues;
- (iii) To identify key factors influencing women's investment decisions in Post Office savings schemes; and
- (iv) To assess the role of Post Office investment schemes in promoting financial inclusion among women.

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for policymakers, postal authorities, and financial planners in designing and strengthening investment products that cater to women investors and support broader financial inclusion goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Investment Behaviour

Investment behaviour refers to the manner in which individuals allocate their savings among different financial instruments based on their preferences, risk perception, and financial goals (Goud, 2022). Studies in behavioural finance consistently report that **women investors differ significantly from men in their investment behaviour**, particularly in terms of risk tolerance, decision-making patterns, and investment priorities (Kannadhasan, 2015). Women tend to be more risk-averse, prefer long-term and secure investment options, and emphasise capital protection over high returns.

Research has also shown that women's investment decisions are influenced by socio-economic factors such as income level, education, age, marital status, and financial literacy (Prasad et al., 2021). Limited access to financial information and lower confidence in financial decision-making further affect women's participation in formal

investment avenues. As a result, women often prefer traditional and institutionally trusted savings instruments that offer safety and stability.

Perception and Attitude toward Investment Avenues

Perception and attitude play a critical role in shaping investment behaviour (Paudel et al., 2024). Perception relates to how investors evaluate the attributes of an investment option, such as safety, return, liquidity, and accessibility, while attitude reflects their overall predisposition toward investing in a particular financial instrument. Positive perceptions and favourable attitudes are likely to lead to stronger investment participation and long-term commitment (Ferreira-Schenk & Dickason-Koekemoer, 2023).

Several studies indicate that women investors place greater importance on **security, trust, and ease of access** when choosing investment avenues (Harshini et al., 2025). Government-backed schemes are often perceived as more reliable and less risky, which positively influences women's attitudes toward such investments. Conversely, complex financial products and volatile market-linked instruments tend to discourage women's participation due to perceived uncertainty and lack of transparency.

Post Office Investment Schemes

Post Office investment schemes have long been recognised as a cornerstone of small savings mobilisation in India. These schemes are designed to cater to small and medium investors by offering assured returns, capital safety, and easy accessibility through an extensive postal network. Common Post Office savings instruments include savings accounts, fixed deposits, recurring deposits, monthly income schemes, and national savings certificates (Sekhar & Ananth, n.d.).

Empirical studies examining Post Office investment schemes highlight their attractiveness among risk-averse investors, particularly women and senior citizens. Factors such as **government backing, guaranteed returns, low minimum investment requirements, and procedural simplicity** contribute to the popularity of these schemes. The physical presence of post offices in rural and semi-urban areas further enhances their accessibility, making them a preferred investment avenue for women with limited exposure to private financial institutions (Tejasmayee et al., 2025).

However, existing research on Post Office investment schemes is relatively limited compared to studies on banking and capital market instruments. Most studies focus on awareness levels and preference patterns, with fewer studies examining women's attitudes and behavioural responses in a comprehensive manner.

Financial Inclusion and Women Investors

Financial inclusion refers to the process of ensuring access to appropriate financial products and services needed by all segments of society at an affordable cost. Women's financial inclusion is widely acknowledged as a key driver of economic empowerment, poverty reduction, and inclusive growth (Hendriks, 2019). Access to formal savings and investment instruments enables women to manage financial risks, accumulate assets, and achieve financial independence.

Government-backed financial institutions, including post offices, play a vital role in advancing financial inclusion by reaching underserved populations (Sodi & Narwani, n.d.). Studies suggest that women are more likely to engage with financial institutions that offer trust, transparency, and user-friendly services. Post Office investment schemes, due to their widespread presence and institutional credibility, contribute significantly to bringing women into the formal financial system (Anson et al., 2013). Despite various policy initiatives aimed at improving financial inclusion, gender gaps in investment participation persist. Understanding women's responses to traditional financial institutions is therefore essential for strengthening inclusive financial strategies.

Factors Influencing Women's Investment Decisions

The literature identifies multiple factors influencing women's investment decisions, including safety of investment, rate of return, liquidity, tax benefits, accessibility, and trust in the institution. Psychological factors

such as risk perception, confidence, and financial awareness also play a crucial role. Studies indicate that women investors often rely on informal sources of information, such as family members and peers, which further shapes their investment choices (Kappal & Rastogi, 2020).

Institutional factors, such as the reputation of the investment provider and government assurance, significantly affect women's responses to savings schemes. Post Office investment avenues, being government-backed and widely recognised, align closely with these preferences, thereby encouraging women's participation (Taylor, 2023).

Research Gap

Although prior studies have explored women's investment behaviour and financial inclusion, **empirical research focusing specifically on women's perceptions, attitudes, and responses toward Post Office investment schemes remains limited**. Existing studies often examine awareness or preference patterns in isolation and lack a comprehensive analysis integrating perception, attitude, and behavioural response. Moreover, there is insufficient empirical evidence assessing the role of Post Office investment schemes as instruments of financial inclusion from a gender perspective.

The present study addresses this gap by systematically examining women investors' perceptions, attitudes, and responses toward Post Office investment schemes and evaluating their contribution to financial inclusion. By adopting a gender-centric and behavioural approach, the study adds to the existing literature and provides insights relevant to policymakers and financial institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study shifts from traditional survey-based methodologies to a **Quantitative Secondary Data Analysis**. This approach is grounded in behavioral finance, specifically "Revealed Preference," which posits that actual investment choices (where money is deposited) are a more accurate reflection of investor perception and attitude than self-reported survey responses.

Data Sources

To ensure reliability and validity, data has been aggregated from official government repositories:

- **Ministry of Finance (MoF):** Data regarding scheme-specific beneficiaries extracted from Parliamentary Q&A sessions (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha).
- **Department of Posts (DoP):** Performance statistics from Annual Reports.
- **Reserve Bank of India (RBI):** Comparative data on small savings collections.

Period of Study

The study covers the financial years **2019-20 to 2024-25**. This timeframe is significant as it captures investment behaviour before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the immediate response to new schemes introduced in 2023.

Data Analysis and Findings

To validate the hypothesis that women prioritize safety and government backing, the study analysed trends in two key gender-specific instruments: the *Mahila Samman Savings Certificate (MSSC)* and the *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)*.

Immediate Response to New Instruments: The "Trust" Factor

The *Mahila Samman Savings Certificate (MSSC)* was launched in April 2023 as a one-time small savings scheme for women (Asif et al., 2023). Data from the Ministry of Finance (Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3333, Dec 2024) reveals an overwhelming response.

Table 1: Performance of MSSC (As of Oct 31, 2024)

Metric	Statistics
Total Accounts Opened	43,30,121 (43.30 Lakhs)
Top Performing State	Tamil Nadu (5.47 Lakh accounts)
Second Highest	Odisha (4.16 Lakh accounts)

Figure 1

Cumulative Accounts (Crores) vs. Financial Year

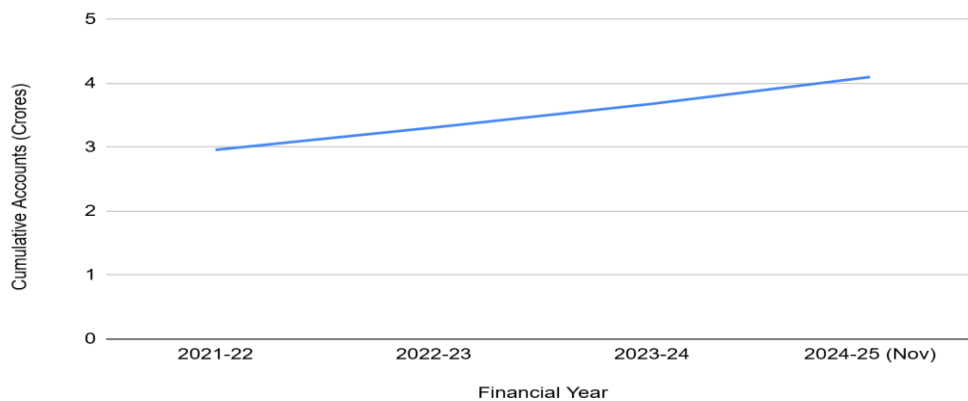
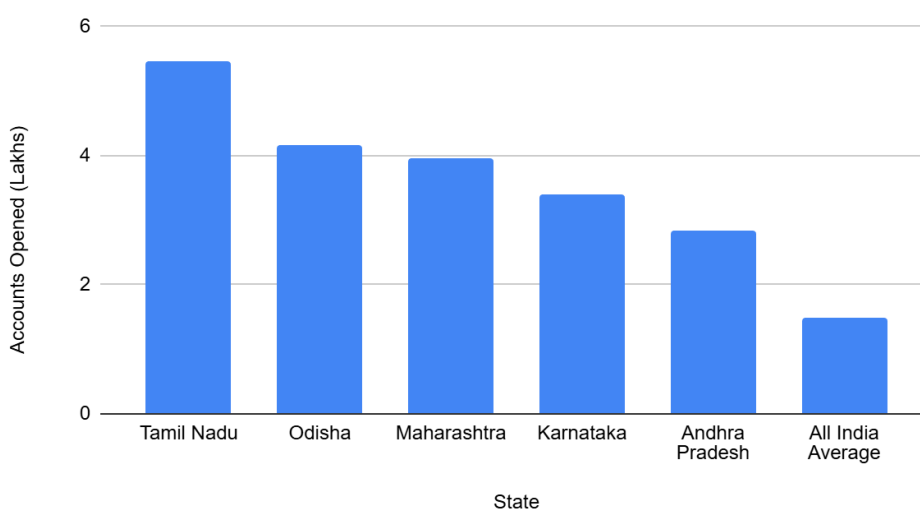


Figure 2

Accounts Opened (Lakhs) vs. State



Interpretation:

Within just 18 months, over 4.3 million women opened accounts. This rapid adoption rate suggests a high latent demand for **medium-term (2-year), safe investment avenues**.

The data also highlights regional inclusion. The high performance of **Odisha** (4.16 lakh accounts)—a state with a significant rural population—demonstrates that the Post Office’s physical accessibility (1.55 lakh branches) effectively bridges the financial inclusion gap in areas where private banking penetration is lower.

Long-Term Financial Commitment: The "Security" Factor

While MSSC highlights short-term behavior, the *Sukanya Samridhi Yojana (SSY)* reflects long-term planning for the girl child (Priya & Kumari, n.d.). As of November 2024, the total number of SSY accounts reached **4.10 Crores**, demonstrating sustained growth even during economic volatility.

Table 2: Growth of Sukanya Samridhi Accounts (2021-2025)

Financial Year	New Accounts Added	Total Cumulative Accounts
2021-22	32.05 Lakhs	2.96 Cr
2022-23	35.15 Lakhs	3.31 Cr
2023-24	37.07 Lakhs	3.68 Cr
2024-25 (Nov)	<i>Ongoing Trend</i>	4.10 Cr

(Source: Compiled from Rajya Sabha Q. No. 2490 and Lok Sabha Q. No. 3747, Dec 2024)

Interpretation:

The data shows a consistent Year-on-Year (YoY) addition of approximately **35–37 lakh new accounts**. This steady upward trajectory, irrespective of market conditions, indicates that for critical life goals (marriage/education), women investors exhibit extreme risk aversion and prefer the **sovereign guarantee** of Post Office schemes over market-linked instruments like Mutual Funds.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the secondary data strongly corroborates the theory that "Institutional Trust" and "Safety" are the primary determinants of women's investment behaviour in India.

- Safety over Yield:** Despite the availability of private financial products offering potentially higher returns, the massive volume of deposits in SSY and MSSC proves that women prioritize **capital protection**. The "Government Backing" aspect of Post Office schemes mitigates the "Financial Anxiety" often reported by women investors in developing economies.
- Inclusion beyond Metros:** The state-wise data (specifically the high adoption in Odisha and Tamil Nadu) suggests that the Post Office is acting as a successful instrument of financial inclusion. It is reaching women in Tier-2 and Tier-3 regions who may be underserved by commercial banks.
- Digital vs. Physical Trust:** While digital transactions are rising, the preference for Post Office schemes implies that women still value the "Phygital" (Physical + Digital) trust model provided by the Department of Posts.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Post Office investment schemes remain a vital pillar of financial inclusion for women in India. The empirical evidence—specifically the opening of 43.30 lakh MSSC accounts and 4.10 crore SSY accounts—demonstrates that women perceive these schemes as highly trustworthy, accessible, and secure.

Policy Implications:

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Since data shows regional disparities, policymakers should focus awareness campaigns in states with lower penetration to ensure equitable financial inclusion.
- **Product Design:** The success of MSSC suggests that women prefer simple, defined-tenure products. Future financial products should mimic this structure—guaranteed returns with minimal paperwork—to attract more women into the formal financial fold.

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