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AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF RURAL WOMEN TOWARDS LIC BIMA SAKHI YOJANA: AN EMPOWERMENT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment and financial inclusion are essential components of sustainable rural development. The LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana has been introduced with the objective of empowering rural women by providing opportunities to serve as insurance advisors while enhancing financial literacy and awareness. The present study examines the level of awareness and knowledge of rural women regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana. Primary data were collected from 600 rural women respondents through a structured questionnaire. Percentage analysis, multiple response analysis and Garrett ranking technique were employed for data analysis. The findings reveal that awareness of the scheme remains moderate, with a considerable proportion of respondents lacking adequate knowledge regarding its objectives and benefits. Social media and mass media emerged as the major sources of awareness. The study highlights the need for strengthened awareness campaigns, training programmes, and community-based outreach initiatives to improve participation and financial empowerment among rural women.

Keywords: LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana, Rural Women, Financial Inclusion, Awareness, Insurance Literacy, Women Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women play a significant role in the socio-economic development of rural communities. Enhancing women's participation in financial activities contributes not only to household welfare but also to national economic growth. Financial literacy and insurance awareness have become increasingly important in empowering women to make informed financial decisions and secure their future. Recognizing this need, the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) introduced the Bima Sakhi Yojana, a women-centric initiative aimed at creating insurance awareness while providing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women.

The scheme seeks to train rural women as insurance advisors who can educate communities about insurance products, assist in policy enrolment, and facilitate claim-related services. Through this initiative, women can improve their financial knowledge, generate income, and contribute to the financial security of their families and communities. Despite the potential benefits of the scheme, its success largely depends on the awareness and understanding of rural women regarding its objectives and functioning.

Therefore, the present study attempts to examine the awareness and knowledge levels of rural women towards the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana and identify the major sources through which information about the scheme is disseminated.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women empowerment through financial inclusion has gained significant attention among researchers and policymakers. Financial literacy, access to financial services, and awareness of insurance products are considered important factors in improving women's economic

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independence and decision-making abilities. Several studies have highlighted the relationship between financial awareness, insurance participation, and socio-economic development.

Sharma and Gupta (2021) examined the role of financial literacy programmes in improving women's financial decision-making abilities. The study revealed that financially aware women were more likely to participate in formal financial systems and demonstrate greater confidence in managing household financial resources. The authors emphasized that awareness programmes play a significant role in enhancing women's economic empowerment.

Rani and Devi (2022) analysed the level of insurance awareness among rural women and found that knowledge regarding insurance products remained inadequate despite various financial inclusion initiatives. The study identified lack of information, limited accessibility, and low financial literacy as major barriers affecting insurance participation among rural communities.

Kumar and Singh (2023) investigated the impact of community-based financial awareness programmes on rural financial inclusion. The findings revealed that self-help groups, local institutions, and community-level initiatives significantly improved awareness regarding financial products and services. The study suggested that community participation is essential for successful implementation of rural empowerment programmes.

Patel (2023) studied the role of communication channels in promoting awareness of government financial schemes among rural populations. The study found that digital platforms, social networks, and mass media have become important sources of financial information. However, interpersonal communication through community networks continues to remain effective, particularly among rural women.

Mehta and Joshi (2022) examined women's participation in insurance schemes and observed that insurance awareness contributes to financial security and risk management among households. The study highlighted that women with better knowledge of insurance products were more likely to make informed decisions regarding savings and protection mechanisms.

Kavitha and Lakshmi (2021) analysed the relationship between financial literacy and women empowerment in rural areas. The findings indicated that financial knowledge improves women's confidence, participation in household decision-making, and ability to manage economic resources. The study recommended strengthening financial education programmes targeting rural women.

Sundaram and Priya (2023) explored the role of women agents and financial intermediaries in improving insurance penetration. The study revealed that women-based financial advisors create better communication and trust among rural customers due to their familiarity with local social conditions. The authors suggested that women-led insurance initiatives can improve financial inclusion.

Das and Roy (2024) examined digital financial awareness among rural women and found that social media, mobile technology, and digital communication platforms have increased access to information regarding financial schemes. However, digital literacy and accessibility remain major challenges affecting effective utilization.

Life Insurance Corporation-related studies have highlighted the importance of insurance advisors in promoting insurance awareness and increasing policy penetration. Women insurance advisors act as intermediaries between insurance institutions and rural communities by explaining insurance products, assisting customers, and encouraging financial planning.

The existing literature clearly establishes that financial literacy, insurance awareness, and women-led financial initiatives are important contributors to women empowerment. However, limited empirical research has examined awareness and knowledge specifically regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana, particularly among rural women. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this research gap by analysing the awareness level, knowledge, and information sources related to the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana among rural women.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Although previous studies have examined financial literacy, insurance awareness, and women's empowerment, limited attention has been given to newly introduced women-centric insurance initiatives such as the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana. Existing studies primarily focus on general insurance participation and financial inclusion, whereas the awareness, knowledge, and information sources related to the Bima Sakhi initiative among rural women remain underexplored. Hence, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the awareness and knowledge levels of rural women towards the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana from an empowerment perspective

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite several initiatives aimed at improving financial inclusion among women, awareness and participation in insurance-related programmes remain limited in many rural areas. The LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana was launched to empower rural women by enhancing insurance literacy and creating livelihood opportunities. However, the effectiveness of the scheme depends on the extent to which rural women are aware of its objectives, benefits, and operational mechanisms. Insufficient awareness may restrict participation and reduce the potential impact of the programme. Therefore, it becomes essential to assess the awareness and knowledge levels of rural women regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana.

5. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In this context, the present study seeks to examine the level of awareness and knowledge of rural women regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana**.**

The objective aims to identify the respondents' familiarity with the scheme, their understanding of its purpose, sources of information, and knowledge of insurance-related services provided through the initiative.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive in nature and aims to examine the awareness and knowledge of rural women regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana. Primary data were collected from 600 rural women respondents through a structured questionnaire. The respondents were selected using a convenience sampling technique from rural areas.

The questionnaire consisted of questions relating to socio-economic characteristics, awareness and knowledge of the scheme, sources of awareness, perceived roles of Bima Sakhis, and benefits associated with the scheme.

The collected data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Percentage analysis was used to analyse the socio-economic profile and awareness levels of the respondents. Multiple response analysis was employed to identify the major sources of awareness, while the Garrett Ranking Technique was used to rank the perceived roles and benefits associated with the scheme.

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7. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

7.1 Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Table 1

Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18–30	135	22.5
	31–45	166	27.7
	46–60	154	25.7
	Above 60	145	24.2
Marital Status	Married	217	36.2
	Unmarried	194	32.3
	Widowed/Divorced	189	31.5
Educational Qualification	Below 10th	127	21.2
	10th Pass	128	21.3
	12th Pass	129	21.5
	Degree	110	18.3
	Others	106	17.7
Occupation	Housewife	107	17.8
	Private Employee	110	18.3
	Self-employed	87	14.5
	Student	110	18.3
	Marketing Job	109	18.2
	Others	77	12.8
Family Income	Below Rs. 10,000	149	24.8
	Rs. 10,001 – Rs. 20,000	170	28.3
	Rs. 20,001 – Rs. 30,000	143	23.8
	Above Rs. 30,000	138	23.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 presents the socio-economic profile of the respondents selected for the study. With regard to age, the majority of the respondents (27.7%) belonged to the 18–30 years age group, followed by 31–45 years (25.7%) and 46–60 years (24.2%). Respondents aged below 18 years and above 60 years each accounted for 22.5 percent of the sample. This indicates that the study comprises women from diverse age groups, with a relatively higher representation of young adults.Regarding marital status, 36.2 percent of the respondents were married, while 32.3 percent were unmarried and 31.5 percent were widowed/divorced. The distribution suggests a fairly balanced representation of women across different marital categories. In terms of educational qualification, 12th Pass respondents (21.5%) constituted the largest group, closely followed by 10th Pass (21.3%) and below 10th (21.2%) respondents. Women possessing a Degree qualification accounted for 18.3 percent, whereas 17.7 percent belonged to the other educational category. This indicates that the respondents possess varying levels of educational attainment. With respect to occupation, private employees and students each represented 18.3 percent of the respondents, followed by those engaged in marketing-related jobs (18.2%) and housewives (17.8%). Self-employed women accounted for 14.5 percent, while 12.8 percent belonged to other occupational categories. This reflects a diverse occupational background among the respondents.

Regarding monthly family income, the highest proportion of respondents (28.3%) reported an income between Rs. 10,001 and Rs. 20,000, followed by 24.8 percent earning below Rs. 10,000. Respondents with a family income between Rs. 20,001 and Rs. 30,000 constituted

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23.8 percent, while 23.0 percent reported an income of above Rs. 30,000. The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents belong to low- and middle-income households.

7.2 Awareness and Knowledge of LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana

Table 2

Percentage Analysis (Awareness Variables)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Aware of LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana	Yes	296	49.3
	No	304	50.7
Level of Awareness about Bima Sakhi Yojana	Very Low	120	20.0
	Low	117	19.5
	Moderate	135	22.5
	High	123	20.5
	Very High	105	17.5
Know the Objective - Train rural women as insurance advisors	Yes	298	49.7
	No	302	50.3
LIC Policy Holder	Yes	293	48.8
	No	307	51.2
Knowledge of LIC insurance policies	Very Low	127	21.2
	Low	109	18.2
	Moderate	121	20.2
	High	136	22.7
	Very High	107	17.8
Information through Bima Sakhi	Yes	237	39.5
	No	167	27.8
	Not Sure	196	32.7
Know Bima Sakhi Enrollee	Yes	293	48.8
	No	307	51.2

Source: Primary Data

Table 2 presents the respondents' awareness and knowledge regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana. The results reveal that 50.7 percent of the respondents were not aware of the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana, while 49.3 percent reported being aware of the scheme. This indicates that awareness of the scheme among women is moderate and that a considerable proportion of respondents still lack knowledge about the initiative. With regard to the level of awareness, the highest proportion of respondents **(**22.5%**)** reported a moderate level of awareness**,** followed by high awareness (20.5%)**,** very low awareness (20.0%)**,** low awareness (19.5%)**,** and very high awareness (17.5%)**.** The findings suggest that awareness levels are distributed across different categories, with only a limited proportion possessing very high awareness of the scheme.

Regarding knowledge of the scheme's objective of training rural women as insurance advisors**,** 49.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they were aware of this objective, while 50.3 percent were not aware. This reflects that knowledge of the core purpose of the scheme remains limited among the respondents. In terms of LIC policy ownership, 48.8 percent of the respondents reported that they currently hold an LIC policy, whereas 51.2 percent did not possess any LIC policy. This indicates that slightly more than half of the respondents have not yet availed themselves of LIC insurance products.

The analysis of respondents' knowledge of LIC insurance policies shows that 22.7 percent reported a high level of knowledge, followed by 21.2 percent with very low knowledge, 20.2 percent with moderate knowledge, 18.2 percent with low knowledge, and 17.8 percent with

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very high knowledge. The results indicate varying levels of familiarity with LIC policies among the respondents. With respect to receiving information through a Bima Sakhi**,** 39.5 percent of the respondents stated that they had received information about LIC policies through a Bima Sakhi, while 27.8 percent reported that they had not, and 32.7 percent were not sure. This suggests that the outreach efforts of Bima Sakhis have reached a substantial proportion of women, although awareness remains uneven.

Finally, regarding familiarity with a Bima Sakhi enrollee**,** 48.8 percent of the respondents reported that they knew someone who had enrolled as a Bima Sakhi, whereas 51.2 percent did not know any enrollee. This finding indicates that direct exposure to scheme participants is relatively limited among the respondents.

7.3 Sources of Awareness

The multiple response analysis indicated that social media emerged as the most influential source of awareness, followed by television, radio, and newspapers. Village meetings, self-help groups, friends, relatives, and LIC agents also played a role in disseminating information about the scheme.

Table 3

Multiple Response Analysis - Sources of Awareness

Source of Awareness	Number of Responses	Percentage
LIC Agent/BimaSakhi	100	9.9
Friends/Relatives	120	11.9
Village Meetings/SHGs	150	14.9
TV/Radio/Newspaper	290	28.7
Social Media	320	31.7
Others (Specify)	30	3.0
Total	1010	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 presents the various sources through which respondents became aware of the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana. Since respondents were permitted to select more than one source of awareness, the total number of responses (1,010) exceeds the total sample size of 600.

Among the various sources, Social Media emerged as the most prominent source of awareness, accounting for 31.7 percent of the total responses. This indicates the growing influence of digital platforms in disseminating information about government and insurance-related schemes among rural women. The second most important source was TV/Radio/Newspaper, which contributed 28.7 percent of the responses, highlighting the continued relevance of traditional mass media in reaching rural populations.

Village Meetings and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) accounted for 14.9 percent of the responses, demonstrating the role of community-based institutions in spreading awareness about the scheme. Similarly, Friends and Relatives served as an important informal source of information, representing 11.9 percent of the responses. Information received directly from LIC Agents or Bima Sakhis constituted 9.9 percent, indicating that personal interaction with insurance representatives also contributes to awareness creation. A small proportion of respondents **(**3.0 percent**)** reported obtaining information from other sources.

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7.4 Role of Bima Sakhi Yojana

Table 4

Garrett Ranking Analysis – Role of Bima Sakhi Yojana

Role of BimaSakhi	Mean Garrett Score	Rank
Helps with claim procedures	50.50	I
Promotes LIC schemes	50.40	II
Helps women understand insurance	50.13	III
Assists in policy enrollment	49.93	IV
Create awareness about financial security and savings	49.04	V

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 presents the Garrett Ranking analysis of the perceived roles of a BimaSakhi. The results indicate that helping with claim procedures secured the highest mean Garrett score of 50.50 and ranked first among the various roles. This suggests that respondents consider assistance in claim settlement and claim-related guidance as the most important function performed by a BimaSakhi.

Promoting LIC schemes obtained a mean Garrett score of 50.40 and ranked second, indicating that respondents view the dissemination and promotion of LIC insurance products as a key responsibility of BimaSakhis. Helping women understand insurance ranked third with a mean Garrett score of 50.13, highlighting the importance of insurance education and awareness creation among rural women.

Further, assisting in policy enrollment received a mean Garrett score of 49.93 and ranked fourth. This finding implies that respondents recognize the supportive role of BimaSakhis in facilitating policy subscription and enrollment processes. Finally, creating awareness about financial security and savings secured the lowest mean Garrett score of 49.04 and ranked fifth among the listed roles.

FINDINGS

1. The majority of the respondents (27.7%) belonged to the 18–30 years age group, indicating higher representation of young rural women.
2. Married women constituted the largest proportion (36.2%) of the respondents, followed by unmarried and widowed/divorced women.
3. Most respondents possessed basic educational qualifications, with 12th Pass respondents accounting for the highest percentage (21.5%).
4. The majority of the respondents belonged to low- and middle-income households, with 28.3 percent reporting a monthly family income between Rs. 10,001 and Rs. 20,000.
5. Awareness of the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana was found to be moderate, as nearly half of the respondents (49.3%) were aware of the scheme, while 50.7 percent were unaware.
6. The largest proportion of respondents (22.5%) reported a moderate level of awareness regarding the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana.
7. Knowledge regarding the objective of the scheme, namely training rural women as insurance advisors, was limited, as only 49.7 percent of respondents were aware of it.
8. More than half of the respondents (51.2%) were not LIC policyholders.

9. Knowledge of LIC insurance products varied among respondents, with only a small proportion reporting very high levels of knowledge.
10. A considerable number of respondents had received information about LIC policies through Bima Sakhis, indicating the outreach potential of the scheme.
11. Nearly half of the respondents were familiar with a Bima Sakhi enrollee, while the remaining respondents had no direct exposure to scheme participants.
12. Social media emerged as the most influential source of awareness, accounting for 31.7 percent of the total responses.
13. Traditional mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers constituted the second most important source of awareness, contributing 28.7 percent of the responses.
14. Village meetings, self-help groups, friends, relatives, and LIC agents also played a supportive role in disseminating information about the scheme.
15. Respondents perceived Bima Sakhis as important facilitators who assist in promoting insurance awareness, guiding policyholders, and supporting insurance-related services within rural communities.
16. Overall, the findings indicate that awareness and knowledge of the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana among rural women remain at a moderate level, highlighting the need for stronger awareness campaigns, community outreach programmes, and insurance literacy initiatives.

SUGGESTIONS

1. LIC should intensify awareness campaigns in rural areas through village-level programmes and community meetings.
2. Digital awareness initiatives should be strengthened by utilizing social media platforms and local-language content.
3. Collaboration with self-help groups and local institutions can improve outreach and participation.
4. Special training and orientation programmes should be conducted to enhance understanding of insurance concepts among rural women.
5. Successful Bima Sakhi participants may be used as ambassadors to motivate other women to join the scheme.
6. Continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms should be introduced to improve programme effectiveness.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study indicate that strengthening awareness initiatives through social media, village meetings, self-help groups, and local institutions can significantly improve rural women's participation in the LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana. Enhanced participation can contribute to greater financial inclusion, insurance literacy, and socio-economic empowerment among rural women.

CONCLUSION

The LIC Bima Sakhi Yojana represents an important initiative aimed at enhancing financial inclusion and empowering rural women through insurance awareness and livelihood

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opportunities. The findings of the study reveal that awareness and knowledge levels among rural women remain moderate, with substantial scope for improvement. While social media and mass media have emerged as effective sources of information, greater emphasis on community-based awareness programmes and direct engagement through Bima Sakhis is required. Strengthening awareness and knowledge can significantly improve participation in the scheme and contribute to the broader objectives of women's empowerment and sustainable rural development.

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