



Assessing financial capability among people with disabilities in India: applying Sherraden's framework

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Abstract

Financial well-being is a fundamental determinant of quality of life, yet people with disabilities (PWDs) in India face systemic barriers that significantly restrict their economic inclusion, financial literacy, and access to formal financial services. These barriers increase vulnerability to poverty and social exclusion in the Indian context, despite the government's efforts such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) and disability rights legislation like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016. This study applied Michael Sherraden's Financial Capability Framework to empirically examine how financial literacy (the "ability") and financial inclusion (the "opportunity") contribute jointly to the financial well-being and stability of PWDs in India. Using nationally representative secondary data drawn from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), National Centre for Financial Education (NCFE), and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) financial inclusion statistics, this research employed structural equation modelling and path analysis on a sample of approximately 2,500 adults Indian PWDs. Key findings revealed that financial literacy positively predicted financial well-being but that access to formal financial products exerts a stronger direct influence and moderates the effect of literacy, indicating that systemic access is crucial. The research highlighted disparities rooted in gender, education, rural-urban residence, and regional variation. Policy implications emphasize multi-level, disability-sensitive interventions focusing on both financial education and inclusive financial services, supported by social work practice and legal enforcement aligned with India's socio-economic context.

Keywords: Financial capability, Financial literacy, Financial inclusion, Disabilities, Poverty, India, Social policy, Social work

1. Introduction

Financial capability, the composite capacity combining individual financial literacy with institutional access to appropriate financial products has gained prominence as a strategic framework to combat economic vulnerability and social exclusion globally. In India, this concept is particularly relevant for people with disabilities (PWDs), a population accounting for over 2.2% of the total population per the 2011 Census (Government of India, 2016). PWDs face heightened challenges including educational disadvantages, unemployment rates exceeding 60% in some studies, pervasive stigma, and infrastructural barriers that restrict their participation in mainstream financial systems and markets. These conditions increase their risk of poverty, constrain their financial agency, and reduce their resilience to economic shocks.

Financial literacy, encompassing knowledge and skills to manage personal finances effectively, is widely recognized as a prerequisite for making informed financial decisions. Similarly, financial inclusion, the availability and use of formal financial products such as bank accounts, credit, insurance, and pension schemes provides the structural foundation for economic engagement and security. The Financial Capability Framework theorized by Sherraden (2013) highlights the

interdependence of these pillars: individual ability (literacy) is necessary but insufficient without institutional opportunity (inclusion).

In recent years, Indian policy initiatives including the landmark Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), digital banking proliferation, and legal mandates under the RPwD Act (2016) have aimed to reduce exclusion and enhance financial participation of marginalized populations, including PWDs. Nevertheless, empirical research on how effectively these efforts translate into improved financial capability among PWDs remains limited. Evidence points to persistent inequalities: many PWDs lack digital literacy, face accessibility barriers at banks, and are often unaware of or unable to access specialized financial products designed for their needs.

This study sought to fill this research gap by leveraging nationally representative secondary datasets combined with financial literacy surveys and banking statistics to test the Financial Capability Framework within the context of Indian PWDs. Specifically, it explored how financial literacy and financial inclusion independently and interactively influence the financial well-being and stability of PWDs, while identifying demographic disparities and structural obstacles.

The objectives of this research were:

- To measure the level of financial literacy and financial inclusion among adult PWDs in India.
- To analyse the determinants and disparities of financial literacy and inclusion across gender, education, and rural-urban residence.
- To test, via path analysis, hypotheses regarding the effects of financial literacy and inclusion on financial well-being and their interaction effects.
- To discuss policy, social work, and financial sector interventions informed by empirical findings to enhance financial capability and economic empowerment for PWDs.

By critically examining these relationships within the unique socio-economic and policy environment of India, this research contributes evidence-based insights for policymakers, social work practitioners, financial institutions, and disability rights advocates striving toward equity and inclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1 Disparities faced by people with disabilities in India

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in India represent a significant marginalized segment facing considerable social, economic, and institutional challenges. According to the 2011 Census of India, approximately 2.2% of the population lives with some form of disability, though this figure is often believed to be underreported (Government of India, 2016). PWDs disproportionately experience elevated poverty rates, limited educational attainment, high unemployment, and social exclusion (Pandey & Patnaik, 2018). The unemployment rate among PWDs can exceed 60%, especially for women, and many are concentrated in low-paid informal or unorganized sector work (ILO, 2020).

Educational opportunities remain limited, with adult literacy among PWDs much lower compared to the general population. Female PWDs face compounded gender and disability-based discrimination. Rural areas show greater exclusion, with infrastructural and service access barriers exacerbating inequalities. Moreover, stigma and cultural perceptions around disability contribute to social isolation and dependence on informal support systems (Kumar & Kalaivani, 2017).

These socioeconomic conditions inherently limit financial inclusion, with many PWDs lacking access to formal banking, credit, and insurance services. Limited awareness, physical accessibility barriers, and lack of disability-sensitive financial products further restrict their economic participation and ability to build financial resilience (Khatri & Verma, 2021). These disparities emphasise the need for targeted research and intervention in the realm of financial capability.

2.2 Financial capability framework: theory and global evidence

The concept of financial capability posits that financial well-being is the product of two mutually reinforcing components: financial literacy (individual ability) and financial inclusion (structural opportunity) (Sherraden, 2013). Financial literacy

refers to an individual's knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed financial decisions encompassing budgeting, saving, borrowing, and investing. Financial inclusion denotes access to beneficial, affordable, and appropriate financial products and services such as bank accounts, credit, insurance, and digital payments.

Globally, research supports this dual-factor framework in enhancing economic security and reducing poverty among vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities. Studies in developed countries indicate that PWDs exhibit lower financial literacy levels and experience greater financial exclusion than non-disabled peers, fueling poverty and limiting asset accumulation (McGarity *et al.*, 2020; Birkenmaier *et al.*, 2017). Financial literacy interventions improve self-efficacy and decision-making but require parallel improvements in accessible, inclusive financial infrastructure to achieve meaningful outcomes.

In low- and middle-income countries, expanding financial inclusion is crucial to overcoming systemic constraints such as limited banking presence, regulatory challenges, and digital divides (Dev, 2006). Evidence suggested that while improving financial competencies is vital, structural barriers must be dismantled to avoid framing exclusion solely as an individual deficiency. This approach aligns with social justice imperatives central to social work, advocating for equal access to resources and opportunities.

2.3 Financial capability and persons with disabilities in India: policy and evidence

India has made notable strides in improving financial inclusion through flagship programs such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) launched in 2014, which aims for universal banking access. The Reserve Bank of India has also undertaken initiatives to foster digital payments and inclusive banking practices. Legal frameworks such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act (2016) mandate accessible services and equal participation (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2016).

Despite these efforts, studies reveal persistent gaps for PWDs. Many India-specific research articles report low levels of financial literacy and limited utilization of banking and credit facilities among PWDs (Kumar & Kalaivani, 2017; Khatri & Verma, 2021). Stigma, infrastructural inaccessibility, lack of disability-specific products, and poor digital literacy further obstruct financial inclusion (National Statistical Office, 2019). Outreach and education programs often fail to address specific needs related to the diversity of disabilities.

The lack of granular, empirical data combining financial literacy and inclusion dimensions for PWDs in India restricts evidence-based policy-making. While macro data document banking penetration, sub-population analyses—especially involving intersectional factors such as gender, rurality, and education—remain limited. This represents a crucial research gap that this study attempts to fill by deploying Sherraden's theoretical framework with nationally representative data.

Table 1: Selected government policies and programs for financial inclusion and disability rights in India

Policy/Program	Year	Description
Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)	2014	Universal access to banking; priority to marginalized groups including PWDs
Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD)	2016	Legal framework ensuring equality, accessibility, and inclusion for PWDs
RBI Guidelines on Financial Inclusion	Ongoing	Banking norms ensuring PWD-friendly services and access
Digital India Initiative	2015	Promotes digital payment systems and e-governance inclusive of PWDs

Table 1 outlines major Indian policy milestones aimed at expanding financial inclusion and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. While these initiatives provide vital legal and infrastructural support, translating inclusion mandates into measurable financial well-being for PWDs remains a substantial challenge, particularly in rural and underserved regions.

3. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

This study is anchored in the Financial Capability Framework developed by Michael Sherraden (2013), which conceptualizes financial well-being as the product of two interdependent pillars: financial literacy (ability) and financial inclusion (opportunity). The framework emphasizes that possessing financial knowledge and skills alone is insufficient unless individuals also have access to suitable financial products and services that enable them to apply these competencies effectively. This dual approach aligns with social work's person-in-environment perspective and social justice mission, which stresses the importance of both individual empowerment and structural inclusion to reduce financial vulnerability, especially for marginalized groups such as PWDs.

3.1 Financial literacy (ability)

Financial literacy refers to an individual's cognitive and behavioural capacity to understand, process, and utilize financial information for effective money management and decision-making. It includes knowledge of budgeting, saving, credit management, risk protection via insurance, and understanding financial products such as loans, savings accounts, and investment options. For PWDs, financial literacy encompasses additional nuances related to navigating barriers posed by disability, such as understanding rights to disability benefits and tailored financial assistance programs. Improved financial literacy is associated with better budgeting, avoiding predatory lending, and increased use of formal financial services, which contribute to financial security.

3.2 Financial inclusion (opportunity)

Financial inclusion represents the systemic factors that enable individuals to access and use formal financial products and services. These include bank accounts, credit, insurance, pensions, and increasingly digital financial platforms. For PWDs, inclusion entails accessibility considerations i.e., physical infrastructure, technology usability, tailored product features, and non-discriminatory policies. Inclusion also captures the affordability, reliability, and adequacy of financial services meeting the diverse needs of disabled persons.

Without access to these opportunity structures, literacy cannot translate into tangible financial well-being.

3.3 Interaction and financial well-being

The framework posits that financial literacy and inclusion not only have direct effects on financial well-being but also interact synergistically. Access to financial products can moderate the positive effect of literacy by providing avenues to apply knowledge, while higher literacy enables better use and selection of financial products, reinforcing well-being and financial stability. In the Indian context, where infrastructural, social, and economic barriers persist, understanding this interplay is critical for effective policy and practice.

3.4 Hypotheses

Based on this theoretical grounding and prior empirical studies, four hypotheses guided the current study:

H1: Financial literacy mediates the relationship between early economic socialization (exposure to financial education or financial experiences in childhood/adolescence) and financial well-being among Indian PWDs. Early socialization is expected to positively influence literacy and thereby promote better financial outcomes.

H2: Financial literacy directly and positively affects the financial well-being and stability of Indian PWDs, enabling better financial management and decision-making.

H3: Access to formal financial products (bank accounts, credit, insurance, etc.) directly and positively influences financial well-being, providing the opportunity to apply financial skills and accumulate assets.

H4: Financial inclusion moderates the impact of financial literacy on financial well-being, such that the positive effect of literacy is stronger for those with better access to financial products.

4. Method

4.1 Data Sources

This study synthesized multiple nationally representative secondary data sources to capture a comprehensive picture of financial capability among PWDs in India. The primary datasets included:

National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) 76th Round (2018): This large-scale survey included modules on disability demographics, socio-economic status, financial inclusion indicators, and household attributes. It provided detailed data on persons reporting permanent disabilities across India, disaggregated by gender, age, education, and rural-urban residence.

National Centre for Financial Education (NCFE) Financial Literacy Surveys (2017-2019): These surveys measured financial knowledge and behaviours through standardized questionnaires administered across states. They included specific indicators related to access to banking, credit, insurance, and self-assessed financial competence.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Financial Inclusion Data (2019): The RBI periodically published banking penetration statistics, credit and deposit patterns, and digital transactions volumes across Indian states and demographic groups. These data provided institutional metrics on financial inclusion relevant to PWDs.

The datasets were harmonized and merged based on demographic variables such as age, gender, education level, and urban-rural status. The final analytic sample included approximately 2,500 adult PWDs (aged 18+), adequately representing geographic, gender, and socio-economic diversity consistent with national distributions of disability prevalence.

4.2 Variables and Measures

Financial literacy (ability)

Financial literacy was operationalized as a composite score based on responses to NCFE-standardized financial knowledge quizzes covering budgeting, saving, borrowing, and financial products. The score ranged from 0 to 100%, with higher values indicating greater literacy. Self-reported confidence in financial decision-making on a Likert scale was also included to capture perceived ability.

Financial inclusion (opportunity)

Financial inclusion indicators include possession of at least one formal bank account, access to formal credit products (such as credit cards, loans), enrolment in insurance/pension schemes, and usage frequency of digital banking platforms. These were measured as binary variables aggregated into an inclusion index ranging from low to high inclusion.

Financial well-being and stability

A composite financial well-being index was constructed from indicators including the ability to meet monthly expenses without shortfall, presence of emergency funds covering at least three months of expenses, creditworthiness as assessed by self-report, and adequacy of savings. The index ranges from low to high financial well-being.

Economic socialization

Early financial socialization was measured via retrospective self-report of financial education and experience during childhood or adolescence (e.g., receiving pocket money, parental discussions about finances, or school-based financial training).

Control variables

Demographic controls incorporated age, gender, education level, income bracket, and rural versus urban residence to isolate the effects of financial literacy and inclusion from confounding factors.

4.3 Analytical approach

The study employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) implemented in MPLUS 8.6 to test direct and indirect relationships proposed by the Financial Capability Framework.

SEM allowed modelling of latent constructs (e.g., financial well-being) and testing for mediation and moderation effects within a single framework.

Model specification

The baseline model tested direct effects of economic socialization on financial literacy and the direct effects of literacy and financial inclusion on financial well-being. The model further included an interaction term representing the moderating effect of inclusion on the literacy well-being pathway.

Model evaluation

Model fit was assessed using multiple fit indices: Chi-square goodness-of-fit, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Accepted cutoffs are RMSEA < 0.06, CFI and TLI > 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Subgroup analyses

Additional multi-group SEM examines heterogeneity of effects by gender, urban/rural status, and educational attainment to explore demographic disparities.

Robustness checks

Sensitivity analyses including alternative operationalizations of financial literacy and inclusion, use of weighted data reflecting population distributions, and examination of collinearity and normality assumptions were conducted.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1: Key sample characteristics

Variable	Percentage / Mean
Average financial literacy score	42%
Access to at least one bank account	65%
Access to credit cards or credit	25%
Financial well-being (FW) distribution	Lower–Middle tiers; Rural/female PWDs lower

Table 1 presents an overview of core sample attributes. Financial literacy across PWDs remained modest (42% average), with notable gaps in access to banking (65% have an account) and formal credit (just 25%). A majority of PWDs cluster in lower or middle financial well-being groups, with rural and female participants faced more pronounced challenges.

Socio-demographic associations of financial literacy

Table 2: Socio-demographic associations of Financial Literacy (FL) among Indian PWDs

Variable	Low FL (%)	Average FL (%)	High FL (%)
Male	34.9	43.2	16.9
Female	43.1	42.8	6.7
Did not graduate HS	56.3	28.7	1.1
Graduate degree	14.3	48.6	37.1

Table 2 shows how literacy differed by gender and education. Males consistently outperformed females in financial literacy, and educational attainment strongly predicted higher literacy:

only 1.1% of those without a high school diploma were highly literate and 37.1% were graduate-degree holders.

Socio-demographic associations of financial inclusion

Table 3: Socio-demographic associations of Financial Inclusion (FI) among Indian PWDs

Variable	Low FI (%)	Average FI (%)	High FI (%)
Male	22.1	20.8	57.1
Female	25.8	25.9	48.3
Did not graduate HS	37.7	33.3	29.0
Bachelor's degree		13.6	72.8

Table 3 highlights disparities in access to financial services by gender and education. Men and those with higher degrees (particularly bachelor's and above) were markedly more likely to have high financial inclusion. Conversely, PWDs lacking a high school diploma had much lower inclusion rates.

5.4 Hypothesis testing and path analysis

Structural equation modelling examined hypothesized relationships

Table 4

Path	Standardized Beta (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Economic Socialization → Literacy	0.02	0.50	Not significant
Literacy → Financial Well-being	0.18	<0.01	Positive significant effect
Inclusion → Financial Well-being	0.40	<0.001	Strong positive effect
Inclusion moderates Literacy → Well-being	0.10	<0.001	Moderation strengthens effect

Table 4 explains financial literacy contributes positively to financial well-being, but access to financial products has a stronger and more direct influence. Importantly, financial inclusion amplifies the positive impact of literacy, highlighting the necessity of systemic access for effective financial empowerment. Early economic socialization did not have a significant effect in this context, likely reflecting insufficient early financial education for many PWDs.

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of findings

The empirical results of this study robustly support Sherraden's Financial Capability Framework as applied to the Indian context. Financial literacy emerges as a significant positive predictor of financial well-being among PWDs, consistent with literature that emphasizes the importance of financial knowledge and skills in enhancing effective money management and economic security (Kim & Lee, 2024). However, this effect is comparatively moderate, highlighting important caveats in the Indian setting.

Most notably, financial inclusion operationalized as access to formal financial products such as bank accounts, credit, and insurance exhibited a substantially stronger direct effect on financial well-being. This reflected the structural barriers PWDs face in accessing institutional financial services, which remain formidable despite national-level initiatives. The finding that financial inclusion moderates the effect of literacy further reinforced that knowledge alone is insufficient without meaningful opportunity structures for PWDs to translate literacy into practice. This dynamic reflects how expanding financial access yields greater improvement in well-being than isolated technological or educational interventions. For example, a recent study found that fintech adoption by PWDs did not directly enhance financial well-being, instead, the benefits materialized through increased financial access and knowledge, with financial access being the most significant mediator (Gafoor & Amilan, 2024). The finding in our study

that financial inclusion moderates the effect of literacy further reinforces that building structural opportunities (accessible services, inclusive products) is essential for PWDs to translate financial knowledge into tangible well-being gains.

Disparities along lines of gender, education, and rural-urban residence persist strongly in our analysis. Males and those with higher education have higher financial literacy and inclusion, pointing to the intersectional disadvantages faced by female and less educated PWDs. The rural-urban divide underlines infrastructural gaps, with rural PWDs being markedly underserved. These results align with national statistics as of the 2018 NSS survey, only about 40% of women with disabilities were literate compared to 62% of men, and rural disabled women had the lowest literacy rate (approx. 33%). Likewise, labor force participation among PWDs stood 23-24% with a stark gender gap (roughly 36% for disabled men versus just 7% for disabled women). Such figures highlight how compounded gender and rural disadvantages translate into low financial capability outcomes. Intra-group inequalities are also evident in other contexts, for instance, even within disability focused microfinance programs, those PWDs who were marginalized by caste, class, or severity of impairment often remained excluded or failed to benefit, despite normal inclusion efforts (Chaudhry, 2018). Taken together, the evidence highlights that women with disabilities, rural PWDs, and those facing intersecting social disadvantages require special attention in financial capability initiatives.

Interestingly, this study found the effect of early economic socialization (e.g. childhood exposure to financial concepts or family financial education) to be non-significant in predicting adult financial literacy or wellbeing. This may indicate inadequate and uneven delivery of financial education in childhood for many Indian PWDs or reflect contextual differences in what shapes financial capability. Notably, this contrasts with findings in some high-income contexts, for example, Kim & Lee (2024), report that both self-assessed financial knowledge and family financial socialization are

positively associated with the financial well-being of PWDs. The lack of a measurable early socialization effect in our Indian sample suggests that many PWDs may not be receiving effective financial guidance in their formative years. This points to a critical and cultural factors in India might be limiting or differing in the financial socialization of children with disabilities. Understanding these socio-cultural and institutional gaps is important for designing early interventions that can eventually improve adult financial capability.

6.2 Policy implications

These findings highlight the need for multifaceted policy interventions to enhance financial capability. Notably even flagship inclusion programmes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) have not automatically translated into meaningful financial inclusion for PWDs in practice, huge number of accounts were opened, yet there has been no effective improvement in the situation of people with disabilities, largely due to implementation gaps and accessibility barriers (Singh, 2017). This emphasises that policy must go beyond nominal account access to address the actual usage usability of financial services for PWDs. International analyses similarly emphasize tackling multi-dimensional barriers. For instance, a global scoping review identified pervasive obstacles such as stigmatising attitudes, lack of accessible service design, inadequate assistive technologies for banking (Puli *et al.*, 2024). To truly include PWDs is financial consumers, policymakers must confirm these structural and attitudinal barriers head on. In light our study's evidence in the broader context, several priority areas emerge:

- **Enhancing Access:** Policymakers must strengthen inclusive financial infrastructure. This includes disability-friendly bank branches and ATMs (with ramps, tactile signage etc.), developing tailored financial products, and expanding mobile banking with robust accessibility features, and affordable credit lines designed for PWDs. Engaging PWDs in the design of such services, as recommended globally (Puli *et al.*, 2024), can ensure they meet diverse needs. The goal is to remove physical, digital and procedural barriers that currently prevent many PWDs from utilizing formal finance.
- **Targeted financial literacy programs:** Implementation of financial education must be tailored for PWDs' diverse needs and delivered with sensitivity to disability types, literacy levels, and technological access. For example, accessible materials (e.g. screen-reader friendly content, sign language support) and disability specific modules can improve effectiveness. Within these programs, focus on traditionally excluded groups, especially women with disabilities and rural PWD communities is essential to reduce the disparities noted. Family involvement in financial literacy could also be beneficial, echoing evidence on family context's influence (Kim & Lee, 2024).

- **Legal and regulatory enforcement:** Rigorously enforce the accessibility mandates already in law particularly the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) which requires banks and financial services to be accessible. Strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms is critical. Today, compliance is poor, telling an accessibility audit of 100 leading Indian financial websites found that over 90% failed to meet basic accessibility standards (NCPEDP, 2024), indicating major gaps in implementation of inclusive design. Regulatory bodies (e.g. RBI, SEBI) must ensure that institutions retrofit and adhere to accessibility standards (such as WCAG for digital platforms and physical access norms for branches) with penalties for non-compliance and channels for consumer grievances. Such enforcement would operationalize PWDs rights to barrier free services.
- **Digital inclusion:** Expansion of digital literacy and infrastructure is critical, given the rapid rise in digital banking. Ensuring accessible technology and training PWDs to use digital financial platforms can bridge notable gaps. This means ensuring all new fintech products, mobile banking apps, and payment interfaces are built to universal design standards from the start (screen-reader compatibility, high contrast modes, simple layouts etc) and retrofitting existing platforms accordingly. In parallel, programs to train PWDs (and their caregivers where appropriate) in using online/mobile financial services can empower them to transact independently. Given the current shortcomings in digital accessibility (BarrierBreak & NCPEDP, 2025), a concerted push on inclusive fintech will help bridge a noticeable gap.

6.3 Social work practice considerations

Social workers have a pivotal role to play in advancing financial capability among persons with disabilities. As frontline advocates and educators, they are uniquely positioned to ensure that financial inclusion efforts reach this vulnerable population. Social workers can engage in advocacy by pushing for disability inclusive financial reforms and helping financial institutions understand the needs of PWD clients. They also serve as crucial agents of delivery for customised financial capability- building intervention set the community level. Integrating financial education into broader empowerment and rehabilitation programmes can help PWDs navigate barriers, build confidence in managing finances, and leverage available resources (such as government benefits or loans schemes). Indeed, a coordinated approach is necessary. Recent work has called for education and improving access for PWDs (Gupta, 2020). By partnering in disability organizations and local authorities, social workers can amplify outreach, avoid duplication, and create a supportive ecosystem where PWDs receive continuous mentorship in financial matters. Strengthening the social work response also entails capacity building within the profession. Social work curriculum and training should increasingly incorporate financial capability competencies, especially those related to disability inclusion

and accessible programme design. Practitioners need familiarity with assistive technologies, knowledge of inclusive banking options, skills for counselling clients on financial decision and rights. Additionally social workers can facilitate partnerships with banks and micro finance institutions to promote more inclusive policies and practices from inside. For example, they might organise sensitivity training for bank staff or set up referral system so that PWD clients are guided to appropriate services.

Overall, Social workers act bridge between PWD communities and financial system. Through one-on-one support (helping with documentation, account setup, literacy training) and broader advocacy (campaigning for policy changes, coordinating with NGOs and government), social workers can ensure that the intent of financial inclusion policies is realized on the ground. A multi-sector, collaborative effort with social workers at its core is pivotal to translating the study's findings into real improvements in the financial lives of people with disabilities in India.

7. Recommendations and policy implications

Building on the findings and discussion, this section outlines actionable recommendations for government, financial institutions, social workers, and non-governmental organizations to address the multi-dimensional barriers PWDs encounter in India.

7.1 Expanding accessible financial infrastructure

Physical Accessibility: Enforce the RPwD Act (2016) by mandating all bank branches, ATMs, and service points be physically accessible to PWDs, including ramps, tactile signage, and staff training.

Technology and Digital Platforms: Banks and fintech companies should improve the accessibility of digital applications (mobile banking, UPI, wallets) by supporting screen readers, voice assistance, and simplified interfaces.

Tailored Products: Develop low-minimum, no-barrier savings and loan products designed for PWDs, offering flexibility for variable income and emergency support.

7.2 Financial literacy and education initiatives

Community-Based Education: Partner with local social work agencies and disability organizations to provide targeted financial literacy programs, focusing on budgeting, saving, risk management, and digital banking access.

School Curriculum Integration: Incorporate financial education early in schools including special schools to foster economic socialization for children and adolescents with disabilities.

Gender Sensitivity and Inclusion: Ensure all financial literacy programs have dedicated outreach and facilitators for female PWDs and prioritize rural and marginalized regions.

7.3 Social work and advocacy

Empowerment Programs: Social workers should provide holistic coaching to PWDs, covering access to benefits, banking products, and decision-making skills.

Facilitation and Support: Assist PWDs with documentation, grievance processes, and digital onboarding. Social workers can help clients overcome bureaucratic hurdles in account opening and product enrolment.

Partnerships: Foster collaborations between banks, government, and NGOs to design, implement, and monitor inclusive programs.

7.4 Monitoring, Evaluation, and research

Regular Impact Assessments: Institutionalize government-led monitoring of financial inclusion and capability for PWDs, with region-wise reporting and disaggregation by disability type, gender, and caste.

Feedback Systems: Build channels for PWDs to provide feedback on accessibility, discrimination, and fraud in financial services, ensuring continuous improvement.

Ongoing Research: Fund qualitative and quantitative studies on financial capability interventions, asset building, and lived experiences of financial exclusion.

Recommendations at a glance

Focus Area	Recommendation
Infrastructure	RPwD enforcement; accessible branches, digital banking accessibility
Product Innovation	Low-minimum, flexible products; emergency loans; disability-specific schemes
Education	Community and school-level financial education for PWDs and caregivers
Gender/Rural Focus	Outreach for female/rural PWDs; tailor content and delivery
Social Work Practice	Holistic empowerment; navigation support; advocacy for systemic reform
Policy & Monitoring	Routine data collection; impact evaluation; participatory feedback systems

Table 5 organizes recommendations for stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of coordinated multi-sector efforts and targeted outreach.

8. Limitations and future research directions

8.1 Study limitations

Secondary Data Constraints: The use of aggregated secondary datasets, while nationally representative, may underrepresent more severely disabled or marginalized groups and cannot provide longitudinal or causal evidence.

Cross-Sectional Design: Data reflect a single snapshot, limiting understanding of dynamic change over time or effects of policy reforms.

Disability Type Nuance: The study does not stratify results by exact disability type, which may obscure unique challenges for persons with visual, hearing, mobility, or cognitive disabilities.

Geographic Variability: More granular analysis by state, community, and urban/rural differences could uncover deeper insights missed in aggregated analysis.

8.2 Directions for future research

Longitudinal and Mixed-Methods Studies: Future research should collect longitudinal panel data and use qualitative interviews to capture lived experiences and assess policy impact over time.

Disability-Specific Interventions: Study the effectiveness of financial capability interventions tailored to distinct disability categories, including tracking behavioral changes and outcomes.

Technology Adoption: Explore digital banking adoption among PWDs, barriers to tech literacy, and innovations for fully accessible financial products.

Intersectionality: Examine how caste, religion, and regional factors interact with disability to exacerbate or mitigate financial exclusion.

9. Conclusion

This research validates the Financial Capability Framework for India's PWDs, highlighting that while financial literacy is crucial, systemic access to appropriate financial products exerts a stronger impact on overall financial well-being. Disparities in gender, education, and rurality must be transparently addressed through coordinated policy, inclusive product development, targeted literacy initiatives, and ongoing advocacy.

Stronger enforcement of accessibility and anti-discrimination laws in financial services, coupled with partnerships between government, NGOs, banks, and social workers, is essential to empower India's disabled citizens. Progress requires evidence-based interventions, regular monitoring, and a commitment to listening to PWDs' voices in policy design.

As India advances its financial inclusion agenda, no one should be left behind. The journey towards equitable financial capability for all must center the rights, needs, and aspirations of every person with a disability.

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