

WHY WOMEN MUST OWN THEIR FINANCIAL FUTURE

'Women's biggest barrier is often mental conditioning, not ability'



Lakshmi Iyer, group president-investments and chief executive officer, Bajaj Alternate Investment Management Ltd.

Career choice

Since school I was good with numbers and wanted a career in finance. Fund management happened largely by chance while I was researching bond markets. I initially planned to shadow a fund manager as a research analyst, but realized I wanted to be in the driver's seat. I was confident that I could do it—and learn the skills I lacked along the way.

Credibility

You must walk the talk. In the end, results speak louder than words. That apart, in fund management, credibility isn't about gender but anticipating the markets, positioning portfolios and delivering returns.

Confidence gap

There could be many reasons. Many women grew up in ecosystems where fathers, siblings or spouses handled investments. The biggest barrier is mental. When you take control of finances, it becomes empowering.

Household power

I manage money at home and family and friends often turn to me for financial advice. I keep it simple—basic, common-sense investment principles. Women managing household budgets should extend that role into some-

thing more meaningful: building long-term wealth.

What to avoid

In *English Vinglish*, the protagonist Sashi says if a man cooks it's a skill, for women it's duty. We often internalize such stereotypes with money. That must change. Women must move from being savers to becoming investors.

Vineeta Bolaki, 56
Bengaluru



Query:

I'm dependent on my husband financially. If I want to start investing, do I start with mutual funds or try day trading?

Response:

It's good idea to take charge of investments. I invest in MFs: they're simple, flexible and allow SIPs, lump sums and systematic withdrawals—an excellent starting point. Best day to start was yesterday, the next best is today. Avoid day trading: it's a very different skill set.

'Women manage money well—the next step is building wealth'



Shibani Kurian, senior fund manager and head of equity research, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company.

Career choice

My father encouraged me to read business newspapers at a young age, which sparked my fascination with economics. I studied economics, pursued an MBA and began my career in equity research at a mutual fund house. Moving into fund management was only a natural progression for me.

Credibility

Credibility in a male-dominated field comes with conviction and consistent results. In fund management, performance and outperformance are the ultimate benchmarks. As the industry evolves, mentorship remains important to help more young women enter and grow in this space.

Confidence gap

Women have traditionally managed 'rainy day' savings at home, so the instinct to invest already exists. With greater workforce participation and financial awareness, more women are moving from passive observers to active financial decision-makers.

Household power

My husband and I manage our finances independently but collaborate on major decisions. Since we both work in financial services, we also guide our

extended family on asset allocation and the benefits of SIPs.

What to avoid

Don't delay the shift from saving to investing. Saving is important, but investing builds wealth. Start early, focus on equities for the long term, and prioritise financial independence.

Deepa Pal, 26
Noida



Query:

My knowledge about investing is limited to insurance and gold, and my financial decisions are taken by other members in the family. How do I start investing?

Response:

Start by defining your goals and investment horizon. Avoid putting all eggs in one basket; focus on asset allocation that suits your risk profile. Start with SIPs, as you can begin with small amounts and build confidence over time.

Women are seen as careful with money—disciplined savers and managers of household finances. Yet, this prudence does not always translate into investing or wealth creation. Indian women retire with nearly 40% less wealth than men, data in a Lxme-EY report showed. Savings accumulate, but not turn into productive assets as investment decisions are deferred. Yet, many women are challenging this stereotype. We spoke to five women investment experts about their journey into finance, building credibility, investing confidence, managing money at home, and one habit to avoid. The special also includes reader queries answered by the experts.

ANN JACOB

'Start early—wealth creation is always about discipline, not luck'



Aparna Karnik, head of quantitative investments and analytics, DSP Mutual Fund.

Career choice

My entry into fund management was about ambition and luck. I pursued an MBA with the aim of working in finance, and my path evolved through my roles in credit ratings, fixed income and risk management, before eventually getting into money management.

Credibility

Managing money is a passion-driven profession where success isn't tied to a degree. Professionals are from diverse fields—engineering to liberal arts. Credibility comes with the right temperament to handle market volatility. It's less about gender and more about aligning your skills with the market's challenges.

Confidence gap

The perception that women lack the confidence to invest stems from traditional roles where men handled finances. It's changing with Gen Z and professional women. Finding a trusted advisor can help navigate complexities of financial planning. Just as we prioritise physical health, women must own their financial health.

Household power

Coming from a family of finance professionals, money management at home is collaborative. Both my husband

and I make financial decisions. I also guide my extended family on investments, emphasising the risks involved.

What to avoid

Don't neglect your financial security. Avoid chasing tips or complex products. Pursue the same discipline as your health, and seek professional advice—it isn't a game of luck.

Neerja Chopra, 42
Gurugram

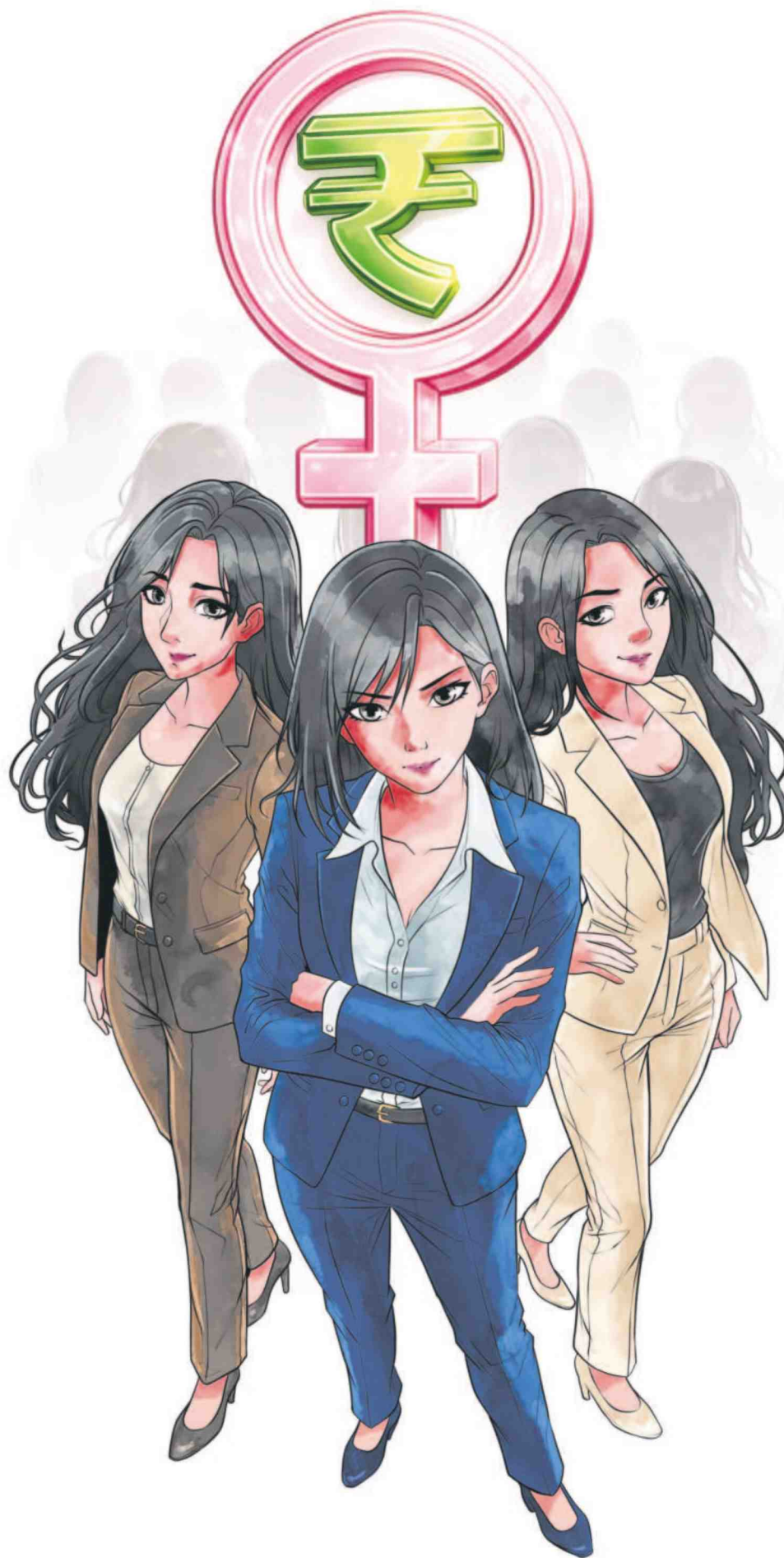


Query:

What does financial independence truly mean for today's working women?

Response:

Financial independence allows you to live life on your own terms. It provides the security to pursue goals—whether buying a home, travelling or higher education. It also builds confidence and resilience in the face of life's uncertainties. Life is unpredictable, so start your investment journey early.



TARUN KUMAR SAHU/MINT

'Invest consistently—the power of compounding needs time'



Mansi Karia, assistant vice president and fund manager, debt, PPFAS Mutual Fund.

Career choice

My journey into fund management was driven more by conviction than planning. I joined PPFAS eight years ago as a debt dealer and gradually learned the discipline of markets and risk management. With strong mentorship, I realized that fund management goes beyond returns—it is about managing trust.

Credibility

While the field is male-dominated, credibility ultimately comes from results and a supportive ecosystem. I've been fortunate to work with leaders who respect my views and encourage growth. As more women gain clarity and confidence in finance, the industry will naturally become more balanced.

Confidence gap

The gap in wealth creation is usually about conditioning, not ability. Women have traditionally prioritised safety, and this leads to underconfidence. Education and starting early are key, and greater awareness will see more women adopt goal-based financial planning.

Household power

My husband, who is also in finance, and I make financial decisions together based on

shared goals. I also guide my family towards long-term, goal-based investing, simplifying asset allocation where possible.

What to avoid

Starting late. Begin early, with small, consistent amounts. Don't let fear of mistakes hold you back—the power of compounding works only with time.

Vasudha Pant, 35
Noida



Query:

I have limited savings, and haven't so far been financially disciplined. With little knowledge and no background in finance, how do I start building long-term financial wealth?

Response:

You have got to start with discipline. Use SIPs for equity and maintain a debt fund for emergencies. Consult a financial adviser to determine an asset allocation that aligns with your risk appetite and goals.

'Don't just save—invest in wealth-creating assets'

Career choice

During my MBA, I became fascinated with security analysis. When Aditya Birla Sun Life offered me an investment role, I seized it. Fund management combines analytical depth and accountability—turns global data into quick decisions while managing risk and preserving capital across cycles.

Credibility

In this industry, credibility is earned via performance and process. Markets are meritocratic—they do not care about gender. Consistent results and a disciplined approach build a lasting reputation.

Confidence gap

Confidence gap in women stems from social conditioning that prioritises security over growth, leading to excessive



Sunaina da Cunha, co-chief investment officer (debt), Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund.

conservatism. Once women start investing, they tend to be disciplined and goal-oriented. The key is to build confidence early and see risk as something to manage, not avoid.

Household power

Managing money is a shared responsibility at home—discussing market trends, risk

appetite and long-term priorities so our financial decisions align with our family's goals.

What to avoid

Don't just be a saver—savings should be channelled into wealth-creating assets. Never delay or delegate decisions—small, consistent investments always compound over time.

Harshita Khandelwal, 24
Delhi



Query:

When monthly investment amounts are small, should one focus on one or two funds or diversify across goals?

Response:

If you are starting with small amounts, the key will be to prioritize a SIP. Break your financial goals into short-term needs—an emergency fund, and long-term aspirations, like buying a home. Start today, as compounding interest truly is the eighth wonder of the world.