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## Policy Assessment of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)

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### ABSTRACT

Most of India's population lives in rural areas where the use of solid biomass for cooking results in high pollutant emissions, severely impacting the health of not just the individuals involved in cooking, but the entire household. According to the World Health Organization, around 1 million deaths in India each year are linked to the use of solid cooking fuels. Mahatma Gandhi famously stated that the future of the nation lies in its villages; hence, India's development is intrinsically tied to the development of its rural areas. To tackle this problem, the Indian government introduced the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in 2016. This initiative aimed to provide 5 crore free LPG connections to below poverty line (BPL) households by March 2019, ensuring universal access to cooking gas. Many of these rural households, being under the poverty line, could not afford LPG connections and relied on harmful biomass fuels. The PMUY was established to help overcome these financial barriers. This study conducts a thorough review of PMUY using secondary data to explore its impact on various societal sectors including women, the economically disadvantaged, and various backward classes, among others. It has been noted that the PMUY has significantly empowered women and addressed health concerns by providing them with LPG connections.

### Introduction

In 2015, 193 countries committed to achieving sustainable development goals, encompassing 17 objectives aimed at eradicating poverty, preserving the planet, and fostering prosperity worldwide. Among these goals, smoke-free cooking stands out as a crucial action with indirect implications for all 17 SDGs, underscoring the global emphasis on clean energy. With the slogan "*Swachh Indhan, Behtar Jeevan*" (Clean Fuel, Better Life), the Government of India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Damodar Modi, launched a social welfare scheme to address the challenges faced by impoverished women due to traditional cooking practices involving firewood, charcoal, and other biomass fuels, which pose serious health risks to women and their families due to high smoke emissions. The Union Budget of 2016 allocated ₹ 8000 crores for the launch of this scheme, aiming to provide 5 crore LPG connections to below poverty line (BPL) families in the name of women beneficiaries. Implementation of the scheme was carried out with the collaboration of Indian Oil Corporation Limited, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited. Provisions were made to subsidize ₹ 1600 for security deposits, including cylinder, pressure regulator, hose pipe, consumer passbook, and installation charges. However, many government schemes aimed at assisting the needy often encounter challenges at the grassroots level, including a lack of transparency, leading to deserving individuals being excluded. Efficiency, transparency, and accountability form the bedrock of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) to ensure its effective implementation and reach those most in need.

### Objective

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), assessing its effectiveness and identifying its beneficiaries.

### Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory approach, incorporating empirical analysis. Secondary resources, including government websites, news articles, reports, and surveys, were utilized to gather data for a descriptive analysis of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).

### Procedures to be a part of Ujjwala Scheme:

- Women aged 18 years and above, who do not currently possess an LPG connection and fall below the poverty line, can apply for an LPG connection by filling out an application form. This form requires specific details such as address, account number, and either a BPL card or Aadhar card.
- Eligibility under the Below Poverty Line (BPL) status is determined using the SECC-2011 database by LPG field officials.
- Upon confirmation of eligibility, oil marketing companies provide free LPG connections to eligible beneficiaries.

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**Aim of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:**

The objective is to enhance the lives and bring joy to many rural women by furnishing them with free LPG connections.

- The primary focus is on providing a clean cooking fuel solution to BPL cardholders. Previously, health issues were prevalent among women due to the excessive use of cow dung, kerosene, or firewood for cooking, with respiratory problems being particularly common due to the emission of carbon dioxide. The launch of PMUY aims to mitigate these health implications.
- To mitigate or ultimately control environmental pollution.
- To fulfil the aspiration of millions of rural women for a smokeless kitchen.

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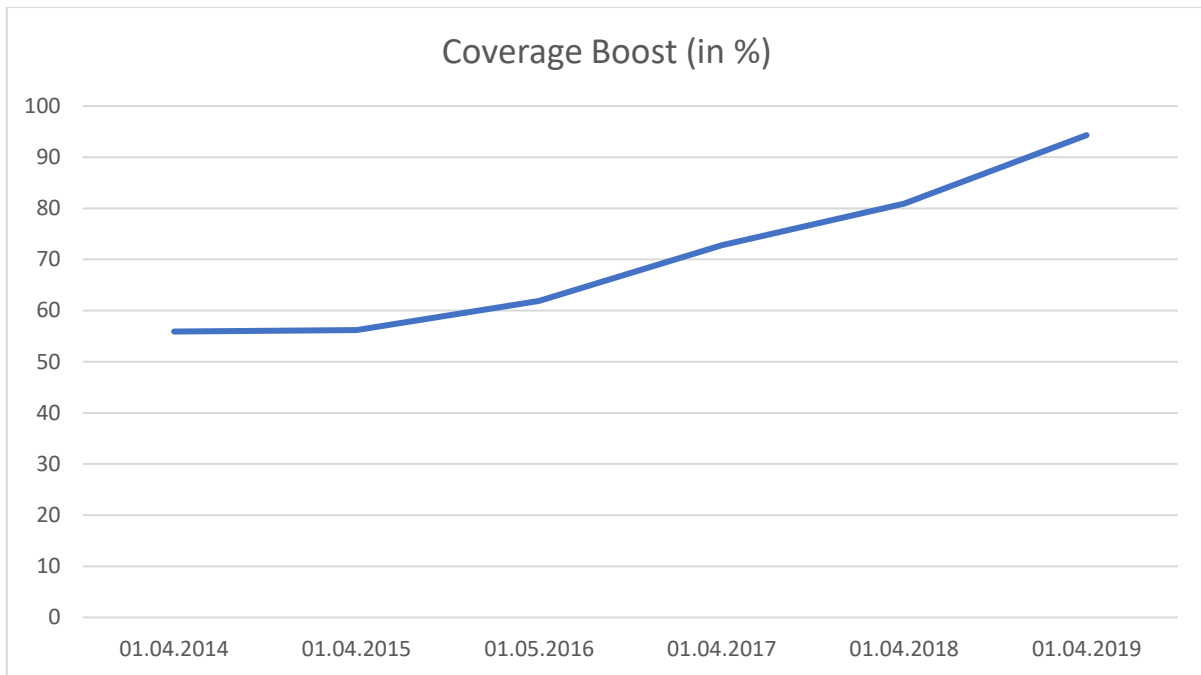
**Key challenges of the scheme:****The implementation of the PMUY scheme encountered several challenges:**

- Identification of impoverished households: Initially, there was difficulty in determining which households should receive LPG connections due to a lack of reliable data on poverty levels. The government addressed this by utilizing the SECC-2011 data to identify eligible beneficiaries for the PMUY.
- Misuse of SECC data: It was discovered that some affluent households were erroneously categorized as below poverty line (BPL) in the SECC-2011 data, posing a significant challenge in verifying the accuracy of the SECC database.
- Safety awareness among beneficiaries: Ensuring that beneficiaries were aware of the safety requirements for cooking with an LPG stove presented a major challenge for the government.
- Unavailability of documents: Many deserving individuals lacked essential documents such as ration cards and Aadhar cards, making it difficult for them to avail themselves of the benefits of the scheme.
- Limited reach of LPG distributors: In numerous areas, the lack of available LPG distributors meant that many people were unable to access the benefits of the Ujjwala scheme.

**Ujjwala 2.0:**

Despite achieving the target of 8 crore connections set during the launch of the PMUY scheme, there are still individuals who lack access to its benefits. In order to extend its reach to all eligible beneficiaries, the scheme was expanded in April 2018 to include women from 7 additional categories (SC/ST, PMAY, AAY, most backward classes, tea garden workers, forest dwellers, and island residents). With the aim of reaching even more households, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the second phase of the Ujjwala Yojana scheme on August 10, 2021. Ujjwala 2.0 seeks to provide LPG connections without deposits to an additional 10 million beneficiaries, as announced in the Union Budget for the financial year 2021-22. This phase specifically targets low-income families and migrant workers who were not covered in the initial phase of PMUY.

**Coverage boost:**

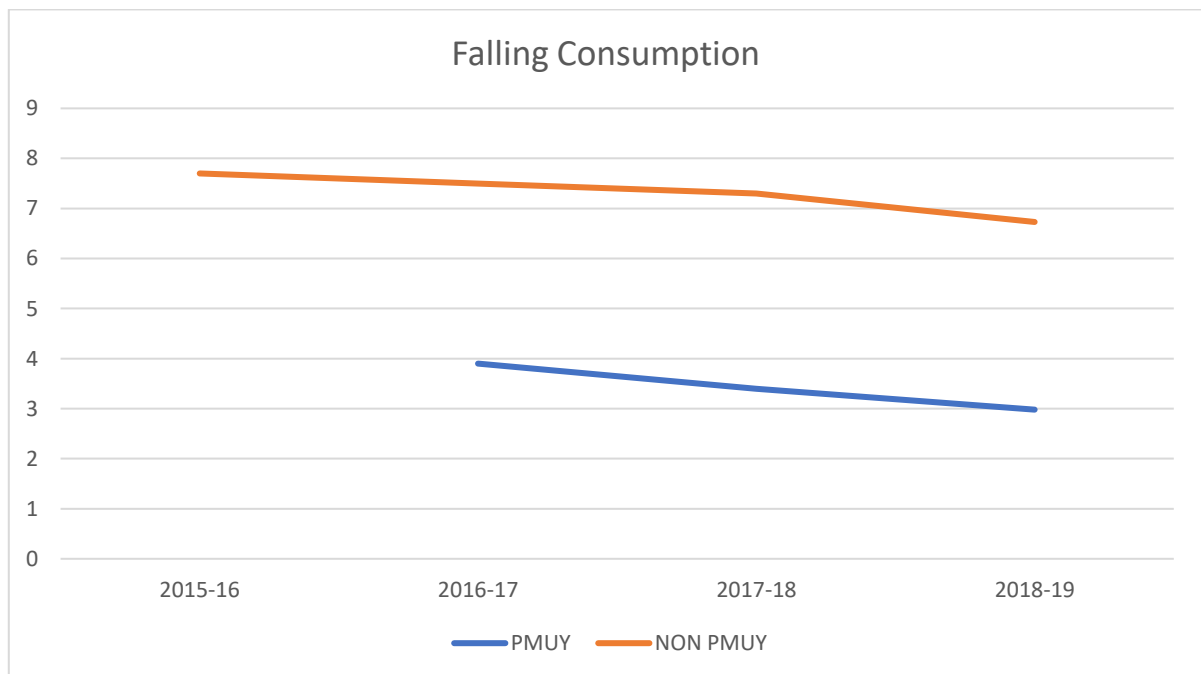


**Fig. 1** Coverage boost

**Source:** Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India

Despite extensive access, the frequency of LPG refills ordered by consumers has been on a decline recently. In the fiscal year 2018-19, the average number of refills dropped to 2.98 per year from 3.4 in 2017-18. Moreover, LPG consumption for BPL families with existing connections was estimated to range from 3 to 4 refills annually.

**Falling consumptions:**



**Fig. 2** Falling consumptions

**Source:** Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India

As of December 31, 2018, among the 31.8 million PMUY consumers who had held an LPG connection for at least a year, 17.4% did not order a second refill, while 33.15% requested only between one and three refills annually. This suggests that over half of the beneficiaries used less than the national average of 3.21 refills per year.

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### Pillars of Ujjwala Scheme:

The government aims to provide safe and accessible clean energy supplies to people through the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, focusing on three key pillars: affordability, accessibility, and adaptability.

- **Affordability:** The majority of PMUY beneficiaries come from low socio-economic backgrounds and struggle to afford the high costs of LPG cylinder refills. To address this, the Government of India has initiated measures to reduce the financial burden of LPG refills and promote sustained usage of LPG as a cleaner, smokeless fuel. With a budget allocation of 8000 crores over 3 years for scheme implementation, initiatives undertaken by the government include recovering loans through subsidies, offering smaller refill options with 5 kg cylinders, and providing free refill schemes under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan package.
- **Accessibility:** PMUY beneficiaries are predominantly located in rural and remote areas. To enhance accessibility, the government has implemented various measures, including establishing warehouses within a 5 km radius of beneficiary homes, commissioning over 6000 new LPG distributors, enabling booking facilities through common service centres, augmenting LPG booking capacity, and commissioning additional bottling plants.
- **Adaptability:** Engaging NGOs and conducting door-to-door campaigns are integral components of efforts to raise awareness among beneficiaries about the benefits of the scheme and the use of LPG. Various campaigns have been launched to promote the adoption of LPG and ensure its successful integration into household cooking practices.

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### Benefits of Ujjwala Scheme:

- Significant transition of individuals from traditional cooking methods to smokeless cooking.
- Empowerment of female householders socially and economically by distributing connections in their names.
- Reduction in the emission of smoke and pollutants, particularly carbon and methane.
- Decrease in the time spent by women collecting fuel, allowing them to allocate their time to other productive activities.
- Mitigation of health issues caused by exposure to household air pollution.

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### Conclusion:

The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana stands as the world's largest poverty alleviation scheme, embodying the vision of our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for comprehensive and inclusive progress. The true measure of success for any scheme lies in the tangible benefits it delivers to those in need at the grassroots level. Through this initiative, the vision of providing every household, whether urban or rural, with an LPG connection to enable smokeless cooking, mitigate environmental hazards, and enhance quality of life has been translated into reality. Widely embraced by the populace, the scheme's mantra, "Swachh Indhan, Behtar Jeevan - Mahilaon Ko Mila Samman" (Clean Fuel, Better Life - Empowering Women), has been realized to a significant extent.

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### Recommendations of PMUY:

- Conduct extensive safety campaigns in bulk to raise awareness among beneficiaries unaware of the use of LPG.
- Establish a comprehensive database to prevent discrepancies and duplication of names, ensuring that the scheme reaches those in genuine need.
- Ensure timely delivery of subsidies and adjust subsidy rates proportionally to LPG price increases, as rising costs are less affordable for low-socioeconomic individuals.
- Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) should expedite the provision of LPG connections without delay.
- Launch government-led awareness and information campaigns to promote an overall increase in the number of LPG refills nationwide.
- Strengthen supply chains to enhance the distribution and availability of LPG.

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