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Do self-help groups affect women's economic empowerment in South Asia?

Early insights from a systematic review of policy evaluations

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Systematic Review

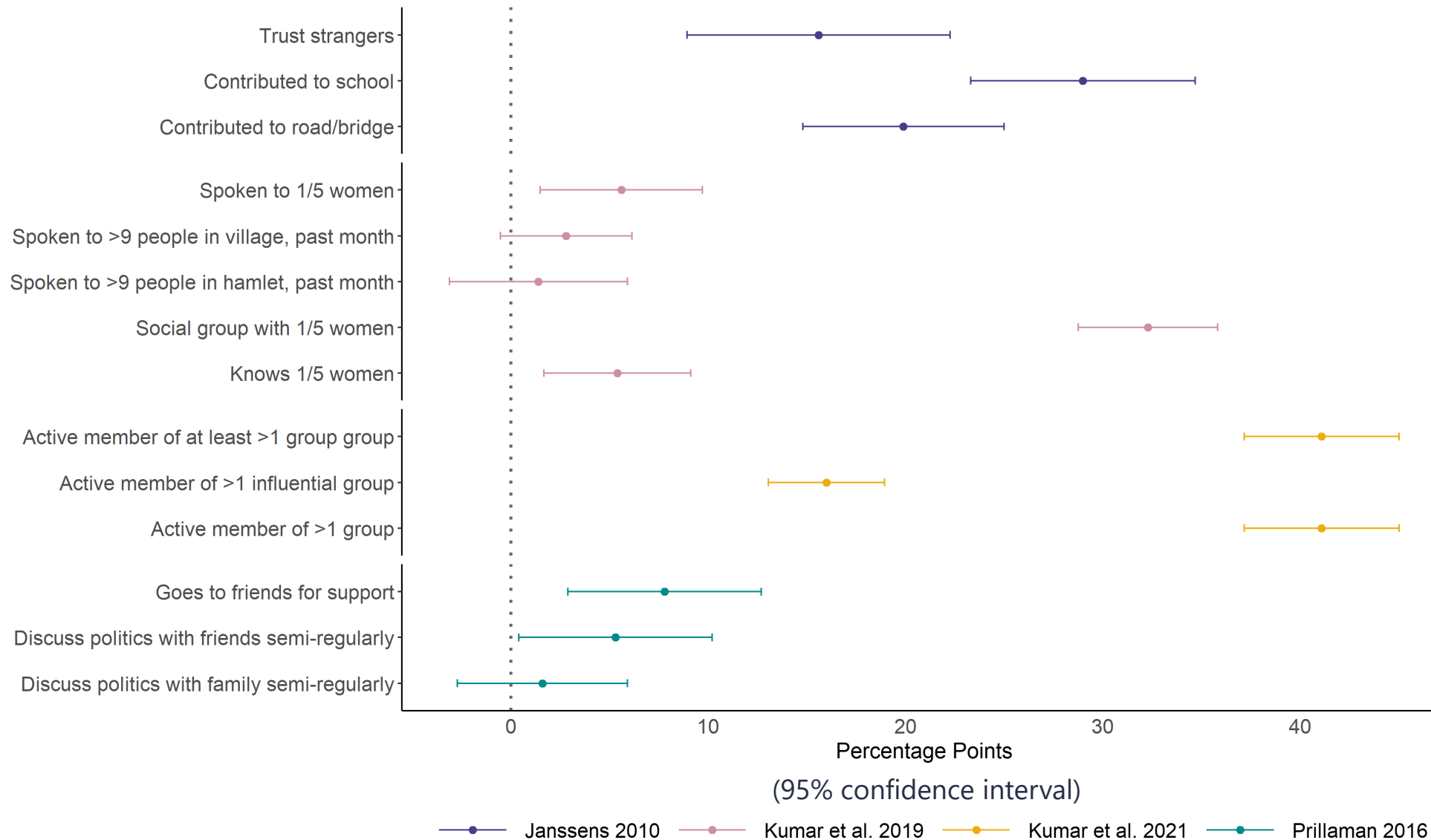
- **Goal:** systematic review of literature to understand impact on women's economic empowerment in South Asia
 - Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations
 - Outcomes: labor market, income, empowerment (social, political, psychological etc.)
- **Self Help Groups:** 10 to 20 individuals from a community voluntarily convening with a common purpose. Involves member participation in group governance, regular face to face interactions, internally generated resources (Brody et al. 2015; Biscaye et al. 2019)
 - 125 million households linked to 10 million SHGs across India (NABARD 2019)
- Filtration of 2 million studies ➡ current list of **31 studies**

Self-help Groups

- Leverage group platform to address restrictive norms and social barriers faced by women in South Asia
- Mechanisms for change:
 - Economic (access to finance, assets and livelihood training)
 - Social capital (network size and depth, peer interaction, soft skills)
 - Agency: Information, mobility, decision making within group (saving amounts, loan approvals, interest rates)

Programs: PRADAN, JEEViKA, SEWA, Indira Kranthi Patham, District Poverty Initiatives Project, Mahila Samakhya, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, Odisha Rural Livelihoods Project (TRIPTI), Safe Cities Initiative, Pudhu Vaazhvu Project, Do Kadam Barabari ki Ore

RESULTS: Social Capital

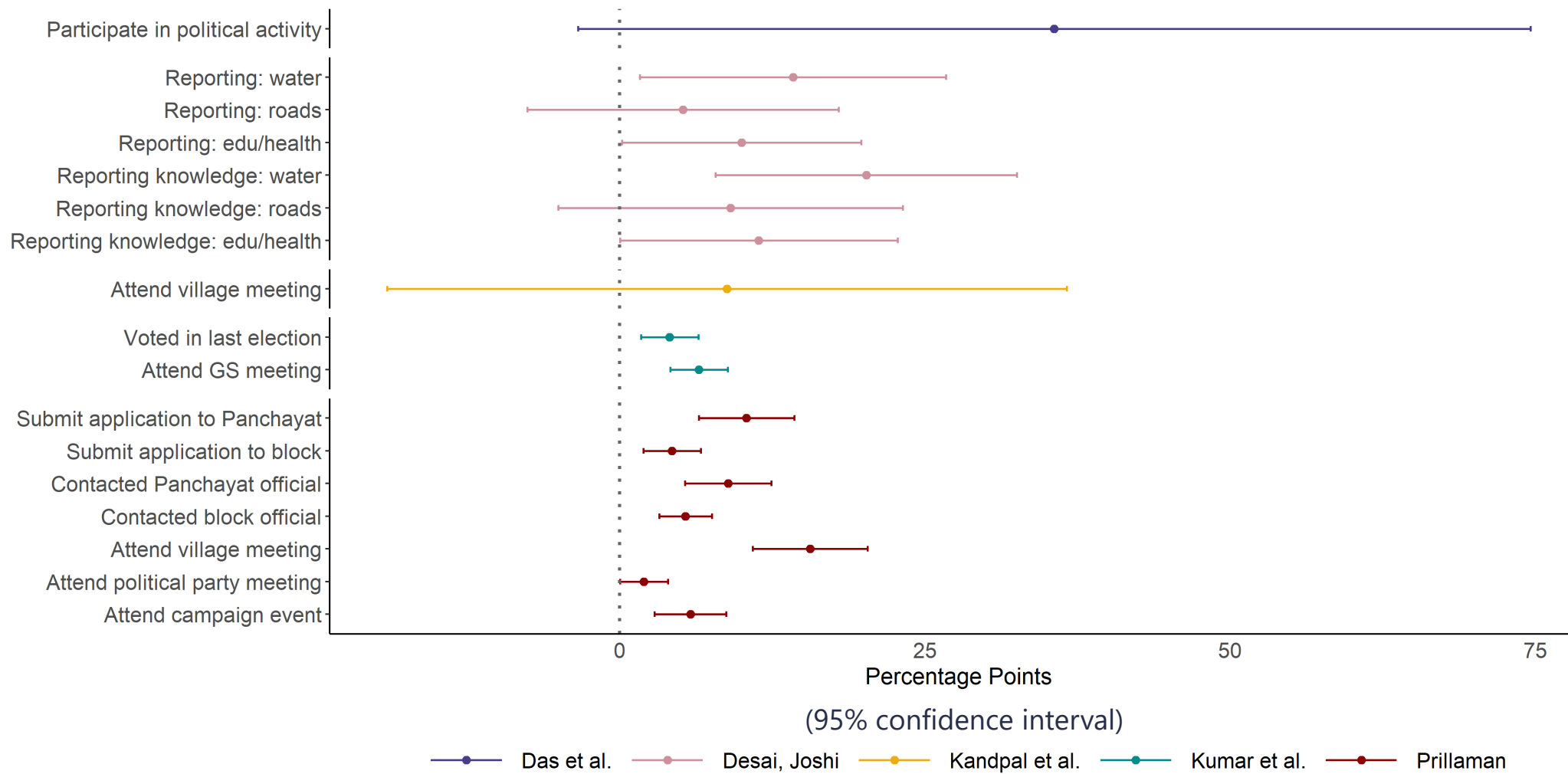


8 studies

Effects range from 2-30% (average 16%) where measured

Measured after 3-6 years of membership (average 4.5)

RESULTS: Civic Inclusion



14 studies

Effects range between 5-160% where measured

Measured after 2-6 years of membership (average 4)

Conclusion

Strong Evidence

- Savings
- Social Capital
- Political participation
- Mobility

Mixed Evidence

- Income
- Labor force participation
- Asset ownership
- Decision making

Lack of Evidence

- Norms and aspirations
- Violence against women
- Psychological empowerment

- Evidence for changes in some outcomes, but not all
- Change takes time
 - Community resistance to self-help groups reduced

THANK YOU

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South Asia
**Gender
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