

LEGAL AWARENESS AMONG GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO COLLEGES IN DELHI NCR REGION AND HARYANA

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Abstract: *Consciousness creation process is an important function to liberate people from oppression and exploitation. Creation of awareness is the primary phase of the process of consciousness creation among the people. Legal awareness has a great role to create legal culture and egalitarian, just society. Especially, legal awareness among female students is significant to achieve equality, freedom from exploitation. This study aims to analyse the level of awareness among the female students at the graduate level from Delhi and Haryana region to understand the level of legal awareness among them. By assessing the existence level of awareness among graduate students, this paper aims to analyse the various sources and resources for obtaining legal information used by them in both regions. Finally, the paper tries to analyse the existing redressal mechanisms that exist in colleges as well as their functioning capacity in spreading legal awareness.*

Keywords: *Legal Awareness; Gender; Redressal Mechanism; Law; legal culture*

INTRODUCTION

Laws play a vital role to make social changes in India and work as a major instrument to protect the rights of weaker sections of the country. In India, various constitutional provisions and specific legislations exist for the weaker sections of the country such as Tribes, Dalits, Women, and religious and sexual minorities. Social reformists and feminists have lobbied for legal reforms both in the private and public life of women (Hasan, 1994). Apart from the domestic law reforms, India is a signatory of various international conventions for women. India has ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 16 (1) of UDHR states that Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and to find a family. They are entitled to equal rights to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Article 3 of the ICCPR provides the right to equality between men and women in the enjoyment of their civil and political rights. Article 3 of ICESCR states that the States undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all rights in this treaty. As a signatory of international conventions and conferences on women, India has implemented domestic laws for women in India.

Directive Principles of the Indian constitution (Article 39A) direct the state to ensure

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equal pay for equal work for men and women. The Constitution of India also ensures the right to equality (Article 14), special provisions for women (Article 15), provisions for free legal aid (Article 39 A), and reservations for women in local administrative bodies (Article 243) (Singh, M. P., 2019). Indian Penal Code (IPC) also defines crimes and prescribes punishment for crimes against women such as rape, dowry death, molestation, and sexual harassment. Special laws for women in private, public, and working places are also operational in India such as The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, and The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, medical termination of pregnancy Act 1971, The maternity benefit Act 1961.

Ironically, the status of women has not changed at a larger level even after the implementation of many legal provisions and programmes in India. Social change and social legislations are interdependent to create desirable change in society. According to Friedman (1965), a working legal system has three components. The first component is *structural* which is the institutions themselves, forms of institutions and the process they perform. The second component is *substantive* which is the output side of the legal system. The third component is the culture which consists of values and attitudes which determine the place of the legal system in the culture of the whole society. These components are interdependent for the effectiveness of each component independently. Indian legal system was influenced by its colonial past and later influenced by the modern western-centric legal concepts. Percolation of these ideas such as women's freedom, equality of men and women, consent before sexual intercourse in marriage, freedom to work and choice of marriage etc. in a traditional patriarchal Indian society especially in rural India is questionable. Contradictions between social culture and desirable legal culture lead to a conflict of cultures that affects the effectiveness of legal reforms and implementation. Failure to pass the women's reservation bill in parliament and the non-criminalisation of marital rape are the finest examples of the helplessness of the government to take radical legal reform in India. Another question is the level of awareness among Indian women on their rights and remedies guaranteed under various laws and social legislations. Legal literacy for the general public and legal awareness among the students both male and female students is essential to cultivate a legal culture for the effective functioning of legal institutions to deliver social justice to women.

Legal awareness among women in India is essential for their participation in public life and empowerment. Lack of legal awareness among women may lead to the exploitation and lack of participation in the process of nation-building. Legal awareness can be divided into three levels. The first level is everyday legal awareness that is typical for a larger population of a particular society. The public legal culture, social calmness, and the way of creating social life largely depend on this first level of legal awareness. The second level is professional legal awareness, which is formed in the process of legal education and practice. The third level is scientific, theoretical legal awareness that includes scientific research on legal culture, the philosophy of law, rulemaking, and conceptual foundations of the legal

regulation of social relations. (Kozhukhova, M. and Zhiyenbayev M., 2018). The first level of legal awareness which creates a legal culture in a country essential to the effective implementation of the legal measure to implant social changes. Dissemination of legal knowledge and legal awareness among the students especially among female students is a vital process to create a culture to ensure women's empowerment. Legal awareness creates legal, political, and civic consciousness among women. In India, different state organs have commenced various programmes to create legal awareness among college students such as the National Commission of women implemented awareness programmes through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and reputed institutions that aim to empower women and girls with the knowledge of their legal rights and duties.

Freire (2017) observes that the existing banking method of teaching has limitations to making the change which emphasises permanence and fatalistic perception among students. He proposes problem-posing education which helps people to develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world. He underlines that problem-posing education is revolutionary and futuristic in nature. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing proposes to design and provide educational programmes through school and community education programmes to raise awareness on gender equality and non-stereotyped gender roles of women and men within the family. So, the question arises that how the Education system, which does not want to change the existing dominant and oppressed social system will make legal consciousness among the students. Existing educational pedagogy does not create legally enlightened students; it creates more static, disciplined, passive students. Finally, the paper tries to analyse the awareness and accessibility of the existing grievance redressal mechanism in colleges to address the needs and problems of students.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the level of legal awareness among the graduate female students on various provisions and legislations related to the rights of women.
2. To analyze the role of classroom teachings to disseminate legal knowledge among students.
3. To examine the knowledge of students on existing redressal and gender-sensitive mechanism in the college and their accessibility.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is empirical research based on a descriptive research design. Data was collected through an online questionnaire from students in the NCR Delhi region and Haryana. Respondents are the female students from women's colleges that were selected purposively based on inclusion criteria which are women's colleges. Collected data has been analysed with help of the IBM SPSS Statistics tool.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION AND LEGAL AWARENESS

Most respondents (89.70) have tried to seek any legal information from various sources and a few (10.30) students have not sought any legal information. Students who have sought information most of the students have relied on the internet for the source of information and the second source of information is mass media. Few students have approached teachers. (9.42%) to get information. Other sources of information are books, legal help and families.

Table No.1: Sources of Legal information

Name of the Region	Sources of information (in frequencies)								Total
	Internet Sources	Books	Legal Source	Teacher	Family	Mass Media	Any Other	NA	
Delhi NCR	93	10	10	15	4	21	4	19	176
State of Haryana	22	2	0	3	1	5	1	3	37
Total	115	12	10	18	5	26	5	22	213

Source: survey conducted in May 2022 through online questionnaire

Table no 1 shows that most students have relied on internet sources as a resource for retrieving information. No student from the state of Haryana has taken legal sources to get information. Mass media is the second major source of information while books and teachers have less significance as a source of legal information for students. This data highlights the influence of internet sources and mass media as a source for both rural and urban students.

Table No 2: Legal information in syllabus or classroom teaching

Course	Responses (in percentage)		Total
	Yes	NO	
BSW	37	0	37
B.A. programme	73	22	95
B.El.Ed	9	0	9
LL.B.	12	1	13
B.Com (P)	12	4	16
B. Com (H)	16	8	24
Medical Courses	6	13	19
Total	165	48	213

Source: survey conducted in May 2022 through online questionnaire

The study shows that 77.5% of respondents have found syllabus and classroom teachings as the source of legal awareness. Table 2 demonstrates that graduate students in education and social work disciplines found that syllabus and classroom teaching provide legal information. Most students, 13 out of 19 students, from medical schools shared that syllabus and classroom teaching does not provide legal awareness.

Table number 3. Level of awareness of various laws related to women's rights

Categories of laws	Name of the Region	Level of Awareness (in frequency)						Total (N)
		Low	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	No absolute awareness	
Starting and eve-teasing	Delhi NCR	6.25	26.14	40.91	12.50	8.52	5.68	176
	State of Haryana	8.11	29.73	24.32	13.51	13.51	10.81	37
Marital laws	Delhi NCR	0.57	18.18	26.70	38.64	12.50	3.41	176
	state of Haryana	0.00	24.32	24.32	29.73	10.81	10.81	37
Violence against women	Delhi NCR	13.07	25.57	38.64	12.50	3.41	6.82	100
	state of Haryana	21.62	21.62	29.73	10.81	10.81	5.41	37
Rape	Delhi NCR	13.64	23.30	39.20	14.20	3.41	6.25	176
	state of Haryana	16.22	35.14	16.22	13.51	10.81	8.11	37
POCSO	Delhi NCR	11.36	19.89	28.98	10.23	5.11	24.43	176
	State of Haryana	13.51	16.22	16.22	16.22	8.11	29.73	37
Fundamental rights	Delhi NCR	6.25	26.14	40.91	12.50	8.52	5.68	176
	State of Haryana	8.11	29.73	24.32	13.51	13.51	10.81	37

Note: Total Number of respondents (N) in the Delhi NCR region is 176 and the total number of respondents (N) in the state of Haryana is 37

Source: survey conducted in May 2022 through online questionnaire

In the analysis of the crosstab table, we find that 5.68% of the students from colleges in the Delhi NCR region are not aware of laws related to stalking and eve-teasing but in the case of colleges from Haryana 10.5 % of students are unaware of the same. In the level of awareness of marital laws, only a few Delhi students are not aware (3.41%) but the number among the students from the state of Haryana is 10.81%. Interestingly, most students from both regions have a good and very good level of awareness about the laws related to marriage. The number of students who are unaware of different laws in Delhi is lower than the number of students from Haryana. Exceptions can be seen in the case of the laws related to rape and POCSO where only a slight difference is visible. The study also shows that of number of students who are unaware of the POCSO Act is higher than the number of students who are unaware of other laws

More than half of the respondents (54.5%) know existing redressal or grievance mechanism in their college. Data reveals a significant fact that near half of them (45.1%) of students do not know the mechanism to seek remedy when there is a violation of their rights on college premises. The study also explores that nearly 40 per cent of the students have approached their grievance and redressal mechanism in college.

Table:4 Knowledge about existing redressal and grievance mechanism in college

Region	Responses (in percentage)	
	Yes	No
Delhi NCR	53.41	46.59
State of Haryana	59.46	40.54
Total	100	100

Total Number of respondents (N) in the Delhi NCR region is 176 and the total number of respondents (N) in the state of Haryana is 37

Source: survey conducted in May 2022 through online questionnaire

Table 4 shows that students from Haryana are more aware of the existing redressal or grievance mechanism in their college than students from colleges in the Delhi NCR region. Hence the location of colleges does not have any impact on the level of awareness about redressal mechanisms.

Table:5 Number of students who have approached existing redressal and grievance mechanisms in college

Region	Responses (in percentage)	
	Yes	No
Delhi NCR	42.05	57.95
State of Haryana	29.73	70.27
Total	100	100

Note: Total Number of respondents (N) in the Delhi NCR region is 176 and the total number of respondents (N) in the state of Haryana is 37

Source: survey conducted in May 2022 through online questionnaire

Table number 5 demonstrates that students from the college in the Delhi NCR region have approached their college mechanism. But few (29.73%) of the students from the colleges of Haryana have utilised their redressal and grievance mechanism.

Table:6 Rating of performance of existing redressal and grievance mechanism in college

Region	Level of satisfaction (in percentage)					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Delhi NCR	6.76	8.11	36.49	21.62	27.03	100
State of Haryana	0.00	0.00	45.45	36.36	18.18	100
Total						

Note: Total Number of respondents (N) is 85 who have approached existing redressal and grievance mechanisms in college. Total Number of respondents (N) in the Delhi NCR region is 74 and the total number of respondents (N) in the state of Haryana is 11.

Source: survey conducted in May 2022 through online questionnaire

Students who have approached redressal and grievance cell have rated their redressal mechanism in college. Most of the students from Delhi and Haryana (36.49%, 45.45%) have rated three. Data also show that 27.03 % of students from the Delhi NCR region and 18.18% of students from Haryana colleges have rated their highest rating for their redressal mechanisms.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Internet resources and mass media are the major sources of information has been used by the students to get information on legal related issues.
- Syllabus and classroom teachings in Delhi NCR region and Haryana provides legal awareness to students.
- More than half of the students are unaware of the redressal of grievance mechanism of their colleges to provide relief and among the students who are aware of the same, half of them have approached the mechanism to get redressal.
- Students have a good and very good level of awareness of marital laws. the number of unaware students from both regions is high.

SUGGESTIONS

- Strengthening democratic and friendly teacher-student relationships and a student-centric atmosphere may help students to approach teachers to get legal information and legal help for students
- Arrangement of permanent professional counselling services especially female student counsellors may help the students to share their problems and to approach authorities to get redressal.
- Inclusion of legal knowledge especially law related to POCSO is essential to assure women's justice
- Dissemination of the knowledge on women's rights under the constitution and various legal provisions may encourage the student to approach the redressal mechanism to assure women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows a lack of awareness among students, especially in the state of Haryana which represents rural India more than the urban Delhi NCR area. Students from both states have less awareness of the POSCO act which highlights the need for more awareness programmes and campaigns to disseminate legal information. In an oppressed and patriarchal society, legal awareness especially knowledge of rights guaranteed under the constitution and various legal provisions are essential elements to keep an egalitarian, democratic and oppression free society. The classroom is not only a space to teach, but it also works as a space of discrimination and use of power by the teachers because it reflects the society that is based on various hierarchical social structures. Optimistically, the classroom also could be a possible space to liberate students by teaching about freedom, rights, and redressal measures to safeguard their rights. Rights without Redressal mechanisms are iron weapons without sharpness; therefore, redressal measures and grievances mechanisms are an integral part of educational institutes to empower the student community to exercise the functions to

safeguard their right in a democratic process of grievance redressal mechanism. The study also underlines the limitation of teachers to work as a trusted and approachable medium for legal information and legal help. It reflects the limitation of existing pedagogy, so the study put forward the importance of creating a democratic and liberal space for the dissemination of legal knowledge.

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