

# Legal Awareness as A Tool for Empowerment: A Cross-Sectional Study of Graduate Students in Chandigarh

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**Abstract-** Legal literacy and awareness are crucial components of democratic participation, access to justice, and youth empowerment. This study investigates the level of legal knowledge, attitudes toward legal institutions, and practices adopted by graduate students in Chandigarh, a city known for its strong educational base. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from a stratified random sample of 1,000 students across disciplines and gender through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including Chi-square tests, t-tests, ANOVA, and multiple regression, were employed to analyze the data. Findings reveal that while students exhibit moderate legal knowledge (mean score: 58.6/100), significant disciplinary differences persist, with law students outperforming others. Gender differences were evident in awareness of gender-specific laws, though not in overall scores. Regression analysis identified discipline and prior exposure to legal workshops as key predictors of legal literacy. The results highlight a gap between rights awareness and procedural competence, emphasizing the need for curriculum integration, legal-aid initiatives, and gender-sensitive programs. By enhancing legal literacy, higher education institutions can strengthen civic participation and empower youth to engage effectively with legal systems, thereby contributing to a more informed and just society.

**Keywords -** Legal Literacy, Legal Awareness, Graduate Students, Access to Justice.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Legal literacy refers to the ability of an individual to understand rights, duties, and the legal mechanisms available to safeguard them. It extends beyond knowledge of statutes to include procedural awareness — knowing how and where to seek remedies when rights are violated. Legal awareness, closely related, implies the consciousness of laws and rights that influence social and civic behaviour. Together, they shape how individuals interact with institutions, resolve conflicts, and participate in governance.

In a rapidly changing society, young people form the backbone of civic participation. Graduate students, in particular, occupy a critical position: they are both learners and future professionals who will carry legal understanding into workplaces, communities, and families. Chandigarh, with its dense network of

universities and colleges, offers an ideal context to assess the state of legal literacy among youth.

### Objectives of The Study

- To measure the level of legal knowledge among graduate students in Chandigarh.
- To assess attitudes toward legal institutions and remedies.
- To examine practices adopted by students when faced with legal issues.
- To provide policy recommendations for strengthening legal awareness and empowerment.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research in India and globally indicates that while education improves general awareness, legal literacy remains uneven and incomplete among youth. Education and awareness: Studies by the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) highlight that higher educational attainment correlates with better

awareness of rights, yet procedural literacy—knowing how to file complaints, access courts, or use consumer forums — remains weak.

**Gender dimension:** Women often show higher awareness of gender-specific protections (such as workplace harassment laws), but are less likely to pursue legal remedies due to social stigma, safety concerns, or financial barriers.

**Discipline effect:** Law and social science students tend to score higher in legal literacy compared to science or commerce streams, where law is not part of the formal curriculum.

**Institutional role:** University-based legal-aid clinics and awareness workshops have been shown to increase both knowledge and confidence in using legal systems (Sharma, 2020; Verma, 2022). However, without continuity, the impact fades over time.

**Youth and civic participation:** Internationally, scholars argue that legal literacy is tied to civic empowerment—legally aware youth are more likely to vote, volunteer, and challenge injustice (Ghai, 2018).

### Need of The Study

In Chandigarh, despite high literacy rates, there is limited research specifically on graduate students' legal awareness. This study fills that gap by combining quantitative and qualitative methods with a representative sample.

### Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 1,000 graduate students drawn from multiple higher education institutions in Chandigarh, including public universities, private colleges, and professional institutes. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across disciplines and gender.

#### -Disciplinary distribution:

- \*Arts/Humanities – 250 students
- Science – 250 students
- Commerce – 200 students
- Professional  
(Education/Management/Technical) – 200 students
- \* Law/Other – 100 students

-Gender distribution: 55% female, 44% male, 1% other

-Residential background: 60% urban, 40% rural  
Out of the 1,250 students approached, 1,000 valid responses were recorded, yielding a response rate of 80%.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional design, assessing the Knowledge and Attitude towards legal literacy and awareness among the graduate students.

### Data Collection Tools

Structured Questionnaire (quantitative):

Knowledge (25 items)

multiple-choice and true/false questions on fundamental rights, consumer law, cyber law, tenancy, POSH Act, and RTI.

Attitudes (15 items)

5-point Likert scale items measuring trust in courts, perceptions of accessibility, and preference for dispute-resolution mechanisms.

### Demographics:

age, gender, discipline, socio-economic status, prior exposure to legal education.

### Procedure

- Institutional permissions and informed consent were obtained.
- A pilot test was conducted with 50 students to refine questions.
- Data was collected over two months using both
- in-person and online questionnaires.

### Reliability and Validity

- Cronbach's alpha for the attitude scale = 0.81, confirming strong internal consistency.
- Content validity established through expert review by legal scholars and social scientists.
- Statistics Used

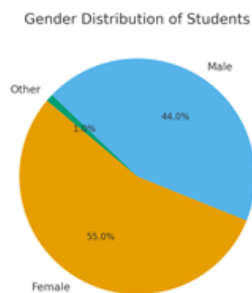
### Descriptive Analysis

Frequencies & percentages were used to summarize responses on legal knowledge items.

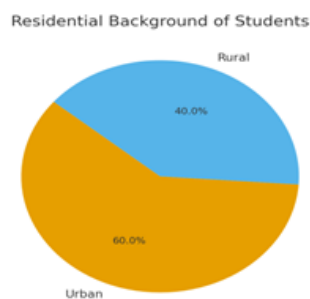
Mean scores were calculated for knowledge (scaled 0–100) and attitude indices. Graphical representation of the discipline wise sample distribution (Graph 1), Gender wise distribution of students (Graph 2), Residential background of students (Graph 3) and Mean legal awareness scores by discipline (Graph 4).



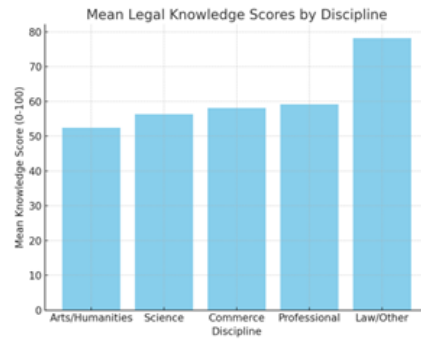
Graph 1: Discipline Wise Sample Distribution



Graph 2: Gender Wise Distribution of Students



Graph 3: Residential background of students



Graph 4: Residential Background of Students  
Inferential Analysis

Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ ): examined associations between categorical variables.

Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )  $\hat{\Delta}^2 = 34.6$   $p < 0.001$

Chi-Square value is significant at 0.01 level of significance.

t-Test: compared mean awareness scores between male and female students.

t-Test (Gender Differences)  $t = 1.25$   $p = 0.21$

ANOVA: tested differences in legal awareness across disciplines.

ANOVA (Across Disciplines)  $F = p < 0.001$   $p < 0.001$

Multiple Regression: predicted legal knowledge scores using predictors such as gender, discipline, urban/rural background, and prior exposure to legal workshops.

Regression Predictors Discipline ( $\hat{\Delta}^2 = .42$ ), Workshops ( $\hat{\Delta}^2 = .28$ )  $p < 0.01$

#### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- Mean knowledge score: 58.6/100 (moderate).
- Discipline effect: Law students scored highest (78.2), Arts lowest (52.4) (ANOVA,  $p < 0.001$ ).
- Gender: Women had higher awareness of POSH Act rights ( $\chi^2 = 34.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but no significant difference in total score ( $t = 1.25$ ,  $p = 0.21$ ).
- Regression analysis: Discipline ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and prior exposure to legal workshops ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly predicted legal literacy.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight a paradox: while graduate students in Chandigarh possess moderate awareness of legal rights, they lack sufficient procedural knowledge to effectively navigate legal institutions. Disciplinary background and exposure to legal workshops emerge as significant predictors of literacy, suggesting that targeted interventions can substantially improve outcomes.

To empower youth through law, educational institutions must:

- Integrate basic law modules into graduate curricula across disciplines.
- Strengthen campus-based legal-aid cells with professional and peer support.
- Leverage digital platforms to provide step-by-step guides for common legal procedures.
- Foster gender-sensitive programs ensuring safe spaces for women to seek redress.

Ultimately, legal literacy is not just about knowing the law but about enabling individuals to act upon that knowledge. By equipping graduate students with the tools to understand and use the law, Chandigarh can model a pathway toward a more informed, empowered, and just society.

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