



## A STUDY OF LEGAL RIGHTS AWARENESS AMONG FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

**Dr. Sarah Basu**

*Assistant Professor, M.Ed. Department, Bareilly College, Bareilly*

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### Abstract

*Awareness about one's rights is said to be first step towards empowerment. The investigation was aimed at assessing the level of legal rights awareness among female college students. The study was carried out on a randomly selected sample of 128 female college students from Bareilly district. The researcher opted for a descriptive survey method and employed a self-developed a Legal Rights Awareness Questionnaire' (LRAQ) to assess the level of legal rights awareness among female college students. Findings reveal that majority of the students (51.56%) had low levels of legal rights awareness. On comparing female students' awareness levels on the basis of various demographic factors, it was found that girls in professional courses showed higher legal rights awareness as compared to those pursuing traditional graduation courses. Also, girls from urban or high SES backgrounds exhibited significantly higher levels of legal rights awareness as compared to those from rural or low SES backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** *legal rights awareness, female college students, traditional and professional courses, SES, urban and rural background*

### Introduction

Women empowerment may be described as the process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. It has some key elements including their sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order. Women empowerment is often talked about in terms of various affirmative actions in the fields of education, training, self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and institutions but rarely, if ever, do we talk about enhance

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women's sense of security and self-worth by raising awareness about their legal rights, thereby empowering them.

Emancipation of women by enhancing their level of awareness of legal provisions is crucial to creating and sustaining a gender inclusive society. The Indian Constitution has a plethora of legal provisions for ensuring dispensing justice and providing gender discrimination free environment to all females. Sadly, a very miniscule percentage of the female population are actually aware about their legal rights and legal recourse available to them.

Some of the major legal safeguards provided to the female population by the Indian Constitution encompasses a wide variety of their day to day lives and multiple challenges that they face at home and home and in their anonymity in reporting sexual offences, right against workplace harassment, right against domestic violence right to free legal aid, right to not be arrested at night, right to register virtual complaints, right against stalking, right against indecent representation and some of the newer regulations including the POCSO act, the Nirbhaya act etc.

A few studies have been carried out in the field of legal awareness among females in the past few years in India. **Subasini, Sasikumar and Kalaiyarasan (2023)** conducted an awareness study about women rights among student teachers from Sivagangai district. The level of awareness on women rights among student teachers was reported to be 81%. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant difference on awareness of women rights among student teachers with respect to gender, subject, locality, qualification, and age. **Sunitha (2022)** in her study of awareness on legal acts-(with reference to young women students in various colleges in Vijayawada city) found that around 56% students were aware of the legal provisions and acts. In case of awareness about toll free numbers, the majority of female students were aware about them. **Nithyanantham and Rekha (2019)** in their study about awareness of social rights and privileges for women among the female understudy educators (B.Ed. trainees) from Chennai found that majority of the female B.Ed. trainees had moderate to high levels of awareness regarding social rights and privileges for women. **Shambhunath (2016)** in a study about the awareness on legal rights of women in Kalaburagi district found that the majority of females surveyed did not have basic knowledge about the various important laws for the protection and safety, equality of women and their rights. This included both urban and rural area women with varying degrees of literacy and educational status. **Das (2015)** carried out a comparative study on the level of awareness about constitutional and legal rights among working and non-working women of Kokrajhar town. In the study, she attempted to gauge the

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awareness level of women regarding their constitutional and legal rights. The findings of the study revealed that highly educated women showed more awareness and understanding of constitutional rights than the women with no education. **Mishra and Mishra (2012)** in a study on awareness of women's rights in rural and urban adolescent girls of Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh surveyed the level of awareness regarding fundamental rights, right for education, health, property, marriage, dowry, pregnancy and abortion, wages and employment, domestic violence, prostitution and eve teasing. Findings revealed that majority of urban adolescent girls had knowledge about women's rights. Differences of knowledge were found among rural and urban adolescent girls regarding fundamental rights, women political right, right for education, health, property, marriage, dowry, pregnancy and abortion, wages and employment, domestic violence, prostitution and eve teasing, with urban adolescent girls showing significantly higher awareness levels as compared to their rural counterparts.

### **Need of the Study**

One of the most powerful and effective ways to empower women is to make them aware of the various legal provisions provided to them. Once they are aware of their legal rights and privileges, they can demand their rights and seek legal recourse, if so required. Legal awareness is in-fact imperative to safeguard the rights of women and promote women's empowerment. The impact of legal awareness on women's lives and combatting violence cannot be overestimated.

Legal empowerment of women is an effective tool to grant them courage to face the challenges of life and seek justice for the crimes. Legal empowerment of women is an effective tool to grant them courage to face the challenges of life and seek justice for the crimes against them. Awareness of the rights of women can be truly meaningful if that awareness is created amongst the younger generations of our society, especially the educated females. Increasing the level of legal rights awareness can assist a person in identifying her role in the general social upliftment of the country and its people and empower them to not only raise voice for their own rights but also their less fortunate sisters.

Female college students can act as torchbearers for their own family, neighbourhood, local areas, villages and communities. The present study was aimed at exploring the impact of education, income, and family background /locality on the level of awareness about legal rights among female college students.

## Objectives of the Study

The present study was carried out with following key objectives:

1. To study the level of legal rights awareness among female college students
2. To compare the level of legal rights awareness among female college students studying conventional (traditional) and professional courses
3. To compare the level of legal rights awareness among female college students from urban and rural backgrounds
4. To compare the level of legal rights awareness among female college students from high SES and low SES backgrounds

## Hypotheses of the Study

1. The level of legal rights awareness among female college students studying conventional (traditional) and professional courses does not differ significantly
2. The level of legal rights awareness among female college students from urban and rural backgrounds does not differ significantly
3. The level of legal rights awareness among female college students from high SES and low SES backgrounds does not differ significantly

## Methodology

The descriptive survey method of research was employed for the present investigation.

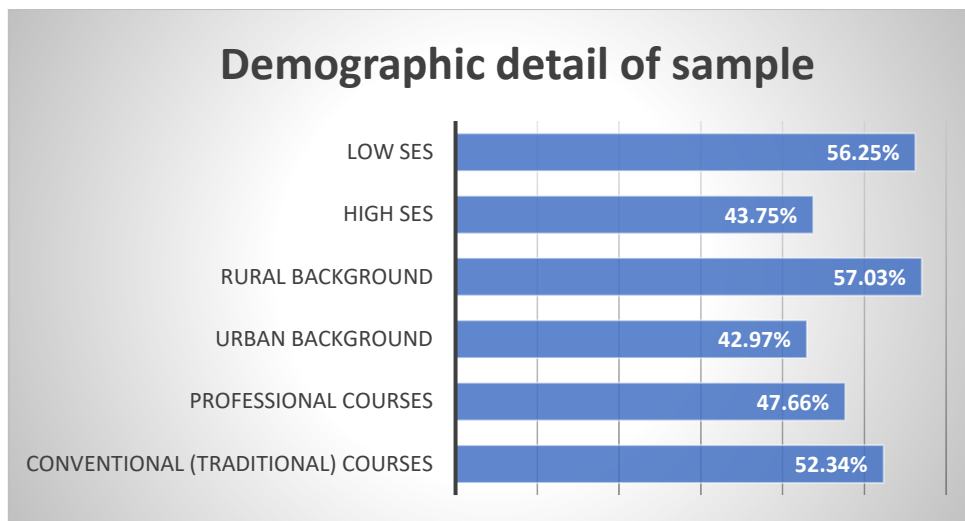
## Population

The female students enrolled in various degree colleges in Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh in various conventional (traditional) and professional courses at undergraduate level in regular mode were considered as population for the present study.

## Sample

A sample of 128 female college students was selected for the present investigation using random sampling technique. Demographic distribution of the sample is as given below:

Demographic details of the female college students	N	%
<b><i>Nature of course</i></b>		
Conventional (traditional) courses	67	52.34%
Professional courses	61	47.66%
<b><i>Locality</i></b>		
Urban background	55	42.97%
Rural background	73	57.03%
<b><i>Socio-economic status (SES)</i></b>		
High SES	56	43.75%
Low SES	72	56.25%



For the present investigation,

Conventional (traditional) courses include B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com.

Professional courses include B.B.A., B.C.A.

Low SES is defined as people with a lower socioeconomic status usually have less access to financial, educational, social, and health resources. For this study, students coming from families with family income less than 3 lakhs per annum were considered as belonging to low SES.

For this study, students coming from families with family income more than 10 lakhs per annum were considered as belonging to high SES.

### **Tool Used**

The investigator employed a self-developed questionnaire '**Legal Rights Awareness Questionnaire**' (LRAQ) to assess the level of legal rights awareness among female college students. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions pertaining to 10 important women centric legal provisions namely right to equal pay, dignity and decency in legal processes, right against workplace harassment, right against domestic violence, right to anonymity for sexual assault victims, right to free legal aid, right not to be arrested at night, right to register virtual complaints, right against indecent representation, right against stalking. The questionnaire required 'yes/ no' response with '1' for correct response and '0' for incorrect response. Maximum possible score on the LRAQ was 30 while the minimum was 0. The LRAQ was prepared in bilingual (Hindi/ English) medium for the ease of the respondents.

### **Administration**

The sample subjects (female undergraduate college students) were given 30 minutes to complete the LRAQ, which required them to just tick the yes/ no response.

## Statistical Measures

The researcher employed percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test for the analysis of the data for the present investigation.

## Data analysis, results and discussion

The data analyzed using various statistical measures yielded the following results:

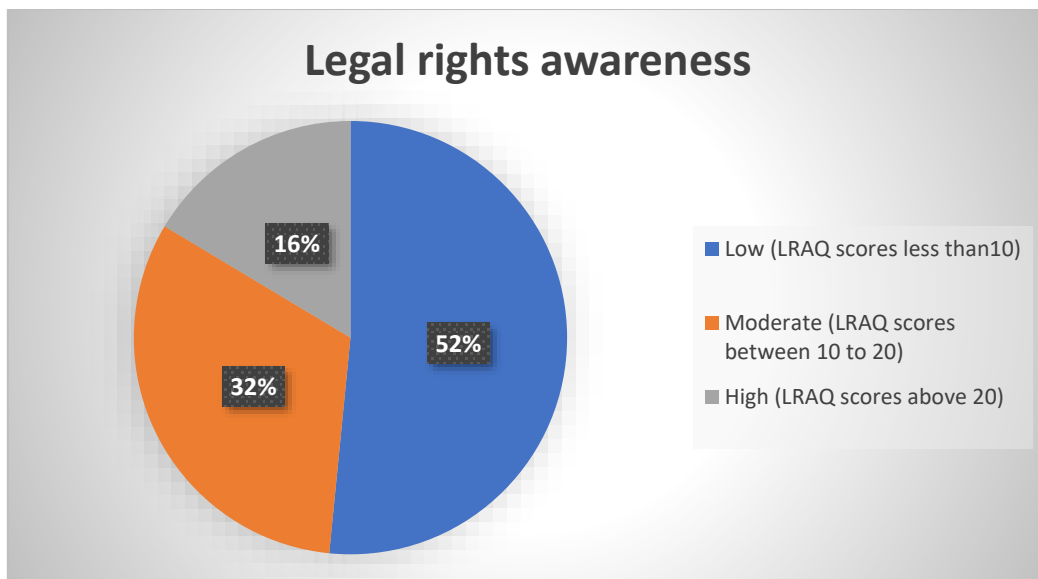
**Table 1: Level of legal rights awareness among female college students**

Level of legal rights awareness	N	%
<b>Low</b> (LRAQ scores less than 10)	66	51.56%
<b>Moderate</b> (LRAQ scores between 10 to 20)	41	32.03%
<b>High</b> (LRAQ scores above 20)	21	16.41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that the greater majority of female college students surveyed for the present investigation did not have adequate knowledge about important legal provisions for women. 51.56% (N= 66) of the female undergraduates exhibited low levels of legal rights awareness, scoring below 10 on the LRAQ. Only a handful of girls seemed to possess good knowledge about their legal rights, with only 16.41% (N= 21) female students scoring above 20 on the LRAQ. 32.03% (N=41) of the female college students surveyed for the present investigation showed moderate levels of awareness about legal rights, scoring between 10 and 20 on the LRAQ.

Overall, the mean for the female college students surveyed for the present investigation was 12.81 (N=128) with a standard deviation of 1.71.

This is indeed a worrisome trend which indicates a need for further, greater in-depth study to determine if a similar situation prevails across other districts and states. There is an urgent need to educate the female students about their legal rights so that they may help spread the word around among the less fortunate, less educated females. This in turn will overall help in creating a more empowered society, where females are aware of legal rights and know how to use them or report abuse of their rights to concerned authorities.



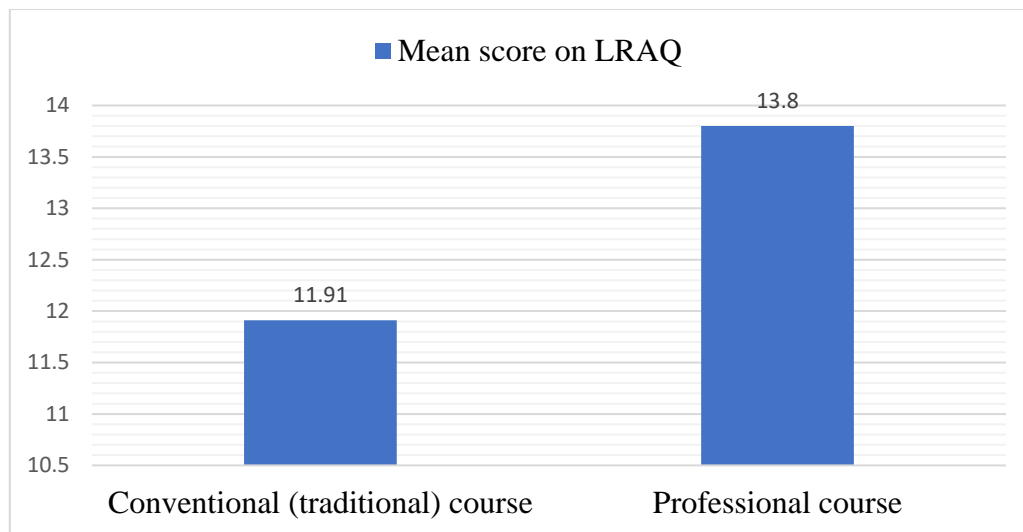
**Table 2: Level of legal rights awareness among female college students studying conventional (traditional) and professional courses**

<i>Nature of course</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Level of significance</i>
Conventional (traditional) courses	67	11.91	1.77	6.29	significant at 0.01 level
Professional courses	61	13.80	1.63		

A perusal of the data presented in Table 2 indicates that female undergraduate students enrolled in conventional (traditional) courses are less aware about their legal rights than their female counterparts enrolled in professional courses. The difference in their levels of legal rights awareness is statistically significant at 0.01 level ( $t=6.29$ ).

Hence, the first null hypothesis “*The level of legal rights awareness among female college students studying conventional (traditional) and professional courses does not differ significantly*” is rejected.

The findings indicate that female undergraduates enrolled in professional courses are significantly more aware of their legal rights as compared to the girls pursuing conventional courses at the graduate level. This could perhaps be attributed to the increased alertness and keener career-oriented mentality among those enrolled in professional courses, or it could be due to family environment and educational background of parents or a combination of many factors. It needs to be explored in much greater depth. This will help in designing legal awareness programmes for girls at the college level.



**Table 3: Level of legal rights awareness among female college students from urban and rural backgrounds**

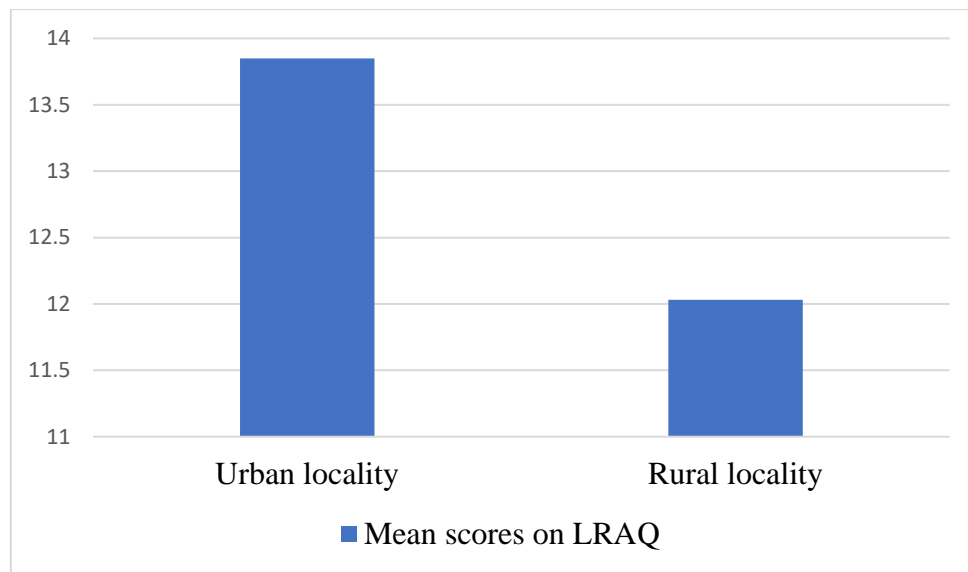
<i>Locality</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Level of significance</i>
Urban background	55	13.85	1.81	5.96	significant at 0.01 level
Rural background	73	12.03	1.57		

A study of the data presented in Table 3 indicates that female undergraduate students from rural backgrounds are less aware about their legal rights than their female counterparts from urban backgrounds. The difference in their levels of legal rights awareness is statistically significant at 0.01 level ( $t=5.96$ ).

Hence, the second null hypothesis “*The level of legal rights awareness among female college students from urban and rural backgrounds does not differ significantly*” is rejected.

The findings indicate that female undergraduates from urban backgrounds are significantly more aware of their legal rights as compared to the girls from rural backgrounds. This could perhaps be attributed to greater exposure to news, social media, discussions at various forums, the increased alertness and keener career-oriented mentality among those from urban areas, or it could be due to family environment and educational background of parents from rural areas or a combination of many factors. It needs to be explored in much greater depth. This will help in designing legal awareness programmes for girls at the college level.

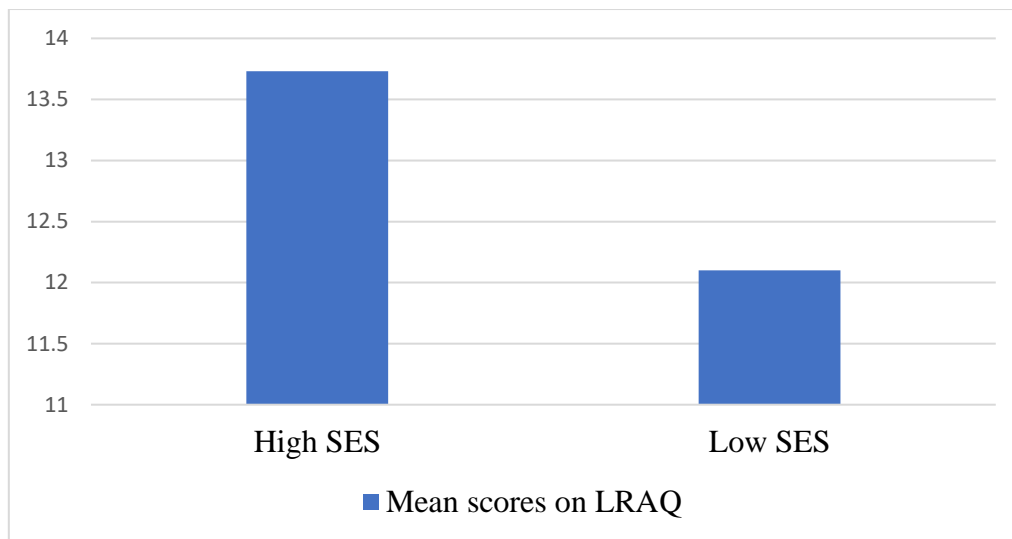




**Table 4: Level of legal rights awareness among female college students from high SES and low SES backgrounds**

<i>Socio-economic status (SES)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Level of significance</i>
High SES	56	13.73	1.78	5.35	significant at 0.01 level
Low SES	72	12.10	1.61		

The data presented in Table 4 reveals that female college students from high SES and low SES backgrounds differ significantly in terms of their levels of awareness about their legal rights. The difference in their levels of legal rights awareness is statistically significant at 0.01 level ( $t=5.35$ ) with female undergraduates from high SES backgrounds exhibiting much higher levels of legal rights awareness as compared to their counterparts from low SES backgrounds. Hence, the third null hypothesis “*The level of legal rights awareness among female college students from high SES and low SES backgrounds does not differ significantly*” is rejected. The increased level of legal rights awareness among female college students from high SES backgrounds could perhaps be attributed to the family educational background, exposure to various media, newspapers and peer group. or a combination of many factors. It needs to be explored in much greater detail in further investigations. This will help in designing legal awareness programmes for girls at the college level.



## Conclusion

The findings of the present investigation indicate a serious need to explore various methods to educate females about their legal rights. The key to truly empowering women is to create greater awareness among them about the various legal provisions and privileges granted to them by the Indian constitution and provide them with the ways and means to exercise their legal rights. This initiative can be kick started by designing and implementing a comprehensive legal rights awareness programme which can be made mandatory in all HEIs. These educated female students can then spread the word ahead, among their families, neighbourhoods, communities till all women at least know their rights.

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