



ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR THE RURAL POOR: THE ROLE OF PARA-LEGAL VOLUNTEERS IN GUNTUR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

Access to justice is a fundamental aspect of a democratic society, yet rural poor and marginalized communities often face significant barriers in exercising their legal rights due to lack of awareness and access to legal aid. This study, titled “*Access to Justice for the Poor: Legal Aid and Legal Awareness Through Para-Legal Volunteers in Rural Areas with Special Reference to Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh*”, examines the role of paralegal volunteers in promoting legal awareness and providing legal aid to disadvantaged populations in rural Guntur District. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining doctrinal analysis of constitutional provisions, statutes, and judicial decisions with empirical fieldwork involving 120 respondents selected through stratified random and purposive sampling. Key legal issues identified include land and property disputes, access to government schemes, labor issues, domestic violence, police harassment, and caste-based discrimination. Group-based legal awareness programs and social legal initiatives emerged as the most effective methods of outreach, while workshops, street plays, and poster campaigns were also valued by the community. The study highlights that legal awareness and access to justice empower rural populations, fostering a legal culture that promotes equality, reduces exploitation, and enables participation in democratic processes.

The research concludes that paralegal volunteers play a critical role in bridging the gap between legal institutions and rural communities, serving as the first point of contact for legal support. The study recommends strengthening paralegal programs, simplifying legal knowledge, and expanding outreach initiatives to ensure that the poor and weaker sections can fully access their rights and benefits guaranteed under the Constitution and other laws. The findings emphasize that legal awareness is not merely educational but a powerful tool for social empowerment, justice, and equitable development.

Keywords: Access to justice, Legal aid, Legal awareness, Paralegal volunteers, Rural communities, Guntur District, India.

1.0 Introduction

According to the preamble of the Constitution, all Indians will be afforded economic, political, and social justice without exception. The 42nd Amendment, which was ratified in 1976, included Article 39-A, which states that the government is obligated to provide free legal aid through legislation or programs. This is done to ensure that no one is prevented from obtaining justice simply due to the fact that they are unable to afford it or are experiencing other hardships. In the years that followed, in 1987, the Legal Services Authorities Act was enacted in order to make this a reality. Legal aid organisations have been established at the national, state, and local levels since that time, and specific committees have been established inside the judicial system to assist individuals in obtaining legal assistance. The legal aid system in India has improved significantly, and even the Lok-Adalats, which are also known as people's courts, have become effective models that are utilised in other countries. Legal aid has been very well defined. Its goals are well known and appreciated all over the world and a definite result based mechanism has been established for it.¹

Legal aid indicates the state’s concern for the wellbeing of its people. The word “legal aid” indicates the support offered by society to its poor citizens so they can protect their rights and freedoms granted by the law. Articles 21 and 39-A of the Indian Constitution provide this right. Legal aid is particularly vital for a healthy democracy because it recognises every person’s dignity and helps develop a fair society. It is not charity but a right and an obligation. Justice P.N. Bhagwati

¹ Chappelletti (1975) Towards equal justice ; A Comparative study of legal aid in Modern societies, Oceana Publications, INO,p.6



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said legal assistance gives a method for people to access the legal system easily and affordably, especially those who need it most. Poor and illiterate people must be able to seek support from the courts so they are not denied justice because they cannot speak the legal language. Judges, lawyers, law schools, social workers, and others have become more aware of legal assistance and are working hard to promote it in India. Changes in the statutes of criminal and civil process have made legal aid possible in many circumstances. The Legal Service Authorities Act 1987 is a key step in this direction.

Paralegal services give them the basic help they need. Paralegal services are a part of the broader legal aid and legal advice system. They build a link between people and the legal system in our democratic country. The PLV program trains volunteers from specific communities to spread legal knowledge and help people get legal support. These volunteers remove the roadblocks that stop people from reaching justice. Paralegal services have the most specific preprimary role in administration of justice as a backbone in delivery of justice. If the administration of justice desires to the implementation legal aid services, schemes, programs legal service, or other related things in administration of justice then they will have to utilize the help of para legal Volunteers and paralegal services. Paralegal volunteers are recruited from different sections of the society.

Legal awareness/Legal Aid is a vital component in terms of rights and duties of the citizens for comprehensive development and empowerment of citizens of the nation. In reference to states of south, India, the current research focused on the necessity to Create Legal Awareness among rural poor community of the chosen regions i.e., Andhra Pradesh, and Telngana, Karnataka, Tamilnadu etc., in India for their empowerment there with progress of the indigenous country.

1.1 Review of Literature

The researcher will be examined, both, the primary and secondary sources of information on the subject, which include the relevant provisions of the Constitutional Law, the Legal services Authorities Act, 1987, legal aid services. The review of literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing research on legal aid services, paralegal volunteers, and their effectiveness in India, particularly among rural and marginalized populations. Various studies have highlighted that while the legal aid system aims to provide access to justice for all, the ground realities often reflect inefficiencies and gaps in service delivery.

Dr. S.S. Sharma (2006)² in this book “Legal Service, Public Interest litigations and Para- Legal Services”, Dr. Sharma has described about the Legal Services, Public Interest Litigations & Para-Legal Services. Dr. Sharma has provided the deep knowledge about Legal–Aid and other connecting things like that meaning, nature, scope, Legal-Aid in foreign countries, Legal –Aid and Human Rights, and National Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 etc. and court judgments in this book. However, this book provides a very little knowledge about the Role of Para-Legal services. However, this book is relevant and useful for this research work.

Justice P.N. Bhagawati (1971) quoted that, “The legal aid means providing an arrangement in the society so that the machinery of administration of justice becomes easily accessible and is not out of reach of those who have to resort to it for enforcement of rights given to them by law. The poor and the illiterate should be able to approach the Courts and their ignorance and poverty should not be an impediment in the ways of their obtaining Justice from the Courts.³ Research indicates that rural populations, especially the poor, women, and weaker sections, have limited awareness of their legal rights, contributing to their reluctance to approach legal aid authorities.

² Dr. S.S. Sharma (2006): Legal Service, Public Interest litigations and Para-Legal Services: Central Law Agency Allahabad: Second Edition 2006.

³ Report of the Legal Aid Committee, 1971, Government of India, P.5



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1.2 Significance of the Study

The poor and weaker section people have difficulty in making use of law due to several reasons, including lack of legal awareness and lack of legal aid services. Most of the population in India is not yet aware of their basic legal rights and obligations merely because of lack of legal awareness which is leading to exploitation of the legal rights and deprivation of personal or fundamental rights guarantee U/A19 and many more benefits of the poor that granted by law. Even though many people in India literate they are in the last row in making use of legal procedures merely lack of awareness. So, instrument of legal awareness and legal aid should be created and used in a proper manner for social change towards empowerment and improvement to the poor people.

The Para-Legal Services play a vital role, as a primary stage and also as an initiation in administration of justice to deliver the justice for economically weaker or poor people but at present these services are facing many challenges in India due to various factor such as social, economic, cultural, political, spiritual, psychological, scientific, customs, usages, practices. However, People do not have legal awareness as law as is a difficult subject to understand.

The conception of Legal & Para-Legal Services has been united in India under supreme law of India namely the Constitution of India under articles 14, 21, 22, 38, 39A, 41, 32, 226, and 332 etc., together with the leading, landmark and other relevant case laws delivered by Hon'ble Indian Judiciary. The judiciary also doing best efforts in creating legal awareness and Legal aid to the poor and weaker section people through proper and contextual interpretation of the enactments made by the legislature to quench the legal needs of the human community. So, the concept of legal awareness and legal aid has assumed a significant roll and recognition in this universe. Present study is selected paralegal education is to disseminate the information about laws ad communitarians of jurists on the sacred laws to the weaker section and poor people. Moreover, especially, laws and legal aid/legal awareness pertaining to poor & weaker section and human rights would be propagated among the poor people. Legal awareness and Legal Aid is an essential element regarding rights and responsibilities of the citizens for the total development and empowerment of citizens of the country. With reference to Guntur Districts in Andhra Pradesh, India. The present study emphasised on the need to create legal awareness and Legal Aid among poor and weaker section community in the rural areas (Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India) for their empowerment there with advancement of the native country. Legal awareness creates legal culture to the poor people in rural areas as how to live in the society without violation of law of the land, which helps to establish welfare society. Rural People without legal awareness/legal aid cannot confront any kind of social evils, anti-social activities and cannot question the political and challenges, social justice issues and the practical application of legal principles.

1.3 Need of the Study

Indian Now a day In India, the graph of attacks has grown vehemently on poor and weaker section. Literacy will give awareness in all aspects of life. Legal awareness is pioneer to understand the legal rights, duties and empowers the poor people to question the authorities when they are at fault in their responsibilities. Without legal awareness and legal aid, a democratic country will not successful why because success of democratic country has been depend up on legal awareness/legal aid of the poor and weaker section.

The goal of paralegal assistance is to address the underlying causes of poverty by working to alter social and economic structures while also educating and organizing the impoverished to help them become aware and influential and to help the institutional changes become unaffected and lifelong. Paralegal and law students support the weaker and poor people in their efforts to get protected rights. The main objectives of paralegal are to get that help because of the financial weak and poor people could not lose their rights. Not only financial weak, social or cultural insignificance also should be the reason for injustice in the society. Lack of awareness is one of the reasons people to do not claim their legal rights. Legal awareness/Legal Aid is a vital component in terms of rights and duties of the rural people for comprehensive development and empowerment of citizens of the nation. In reference to Guntur Districts of Andhra Pradesh, India, the current research focused on the necessity to Create Legal Awareness among deprived community of the chosen regions (Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, India) for their empowerment there with progress of the indigenous country. Legal awareness/Legal Aid



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Develops Legal Culture to the citizens as how to live in the society without breaking law of the land which is helpful to build welfare society. Though education makes women empowered, Legal Awareness would make poor and weaker section of people legally empowered, which is an important concept in globalization era. For society to develop healthily, awareness of subjects such as gender equality, environmental degradation, health care, legal education, etc., is important.

1.4 Objective of the Study

- 1 To study the legal, economic and social empowerment of poor and weaker section people by Paralegal Volunteers in Rural areas
- 2 To create and develop the awareness on legal among poor and weaker section people regarding the acts enacted exclusively for poor by legislature
- 3 To critically analyze the current state of legal aid awareness initiatives for the poor in rural areas, with a specific focus on the role and effectiveness of Paralegal volunteers
- 4 To assess the impact of involving paralegal volunteers in delivering legal aid and awareness programmes to Marginalized communities in rural settings
- 5 To evaluate the effectiveness of legal aid and awareness programmes delivered by paralegal volunteers in addressing the legal needs of rural poor and weaker sections people and etc.

1.5 Hypothesis

Hypothesis is an idea, which will create an impulse on re-researcher to identify the procedure and methods to be followed in solving the selected problem or topic. A strategically designed and actively implemented legal aid and awareness program, delivered through trained paralegal volunteers, will demonstrably increase legal awareness and access to justice for the poor in rural areas, leading to a statistically significant reduction in instances of rights violations and an increased utilization of available legal aid mechanisms.

In the present study “*Access to Justice for The Poor: Legal Aid and Legal Awareness Through Para-Legal Volunteers in Rural Areas with Special Reference to Guntur District*”. The rural poor and weaker section people in Andhra Pradesh have low rate awareness of their rights to free legal aid due to insufficient outreach and legal education at the grassroots level. Without legal awareness and legal aid regarding existing laws it is difficult to empower the poor people to know about their rights and duties that provided by law which is obstacle for the development of the country.

1.6 Research Methodology

The study includes a discussion on the structure, functioning and services, awareness / legal aid in all aspects including aspects to the poor / weaker section at Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh. The study explores the challenges in providing legal aid, raising legal awareness and establishing alternate dispute resolutions through Lok-Adalats at the State, District and Talukas with special reference to Guntur District Andhra Pradesh. The present research study includes both doctrinal and empirical study. The collection of data is depended upon both primary and secondary sources namely constitutional provisions to the poor people, enactments, judicial decisions from time to time and internet sources are also employed as primary sources of the study.

Sample Selection of the Study

The study had conducted in the rural areas of Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, to assess the level of legal awareness and access to legal aid among the rural population. Out of 15 Mandals, the researcher for the collection of data visits only 10 rural villages and they have responded to the researcher’s request as random population for the purpose of the survey. *120 rural people various categories of people (i.e women, farmers, scheduled castes, schedule tribes, person with disabilities, economically vulnerable person, etc., from weaker section) consulted, and researcher were conducted through interviewed and directly observed held but out of 175 only 120 responded. Respondents had selected using a combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling methods to ensure broad representation across different demographic and socio-economic segments.*



1.7 Research Limitation

The present study will be covers in rural areas at Guntur District states of Andhra Pradesh in India, the poor people through Paralegal volunteers who is working under the supervision of Government Agencies (i.e., District, Taluka Level), to catering the legal aid and legal awareness services among the poor and weaker section people. The areas of empirical research/study are only Guntur District states of Andhra Pradesh in India with special reference rural areas. Therefore, this research/ study is having its own limitations including the above-mentioned, which are as under: Further, the sample selected is small as the time of the thesis is very short. In contrast, the rural poor and weaker sections often lacking both education and resources remain unaware of their legal rights, duties and the assistance available to them. This gap highlights the urgent need to expand legal literacy and strengthen outreach efforts to ensure that legal aid truly serves the most helpless.

Empirical study

Do you have knowledge about the Law?

The common man does not have knowledge about the laws which do the frequent changes in the society. It is a known fact that the common man cannot understand the legal terminology and the activities going on the law courts. In this chapter briefly focus on the basic view of the legal awareness through NGOs, and other Government organizations, to create legal awareness among the women community.

Table No. 1. Understanding about the Law

S. No.	Opinion, Number of Responses (120)	Number of Responses	Total %
1	Yes	48	40.00
2	No	72	60.00
3	Total	120	100.00

It may be observed from the table that majority of 60 % of people have not awareness about the law. However, only 40% of people have known about law.

What are the most common legal problems faced in your area?

The Poor and weaker section and even the citizens of the country require the advice of the advocate to understand the exact meaning of the provisions of the Act and regulation. People who need the most legal aid and legal awareness have the least access to it. A change must occur through public legal education the poor and weaker section to demand their just rights through established legal procedures.

Table No.2. Knowledge about the most common legal problems faced in that area

S. No	Opinion Number of Responses (120)	YES %	NO %	Total %
1	Land /Property Disputes	82 68.33	38 31.66	120 100.00
2	Domestic Violence	47 39.16	73 60.83	120 100.00
3	Labour issues	62 51.66	58 68.34	120 100.00
4	Cast Based discrimination	59 49.16	61 50.84	120 100.00
5	Access to Government schemes	73 60.83	47 39.17	120 100.00
6	Police Harassment	64 53.33	56 43.67	120 100.00



The data analyses of responses show that the highest percent of people 68.33 % of the poor and weaker section people facing on Land /Property Disputes. It is further observed that 60.83 % people facing on Access to Government schemes, and 53.33% and 51.66 % % facing in society on Police Harassment and Labour issues. It is also observed on caste base issues in the rural society and domestic violence, above legal issues in the society respectively.

Do you know about legal awareness?

Legal awareness is the empowerment of individuals regarding issues involving the law. Legal awareness helps to promote legal culture, to shape the applicability of laws from time to time to meet the changing needs of the society and the rule of law. Legal awareness is a form of social consciousness, which is a system of legal opinions, theories, ideas, concepts, beliefs, estimations, moods, feelings, which are expressed by the ratio of individuals, social groups.

Table No.3. Know about legal awareness or not?

S. No.	Opinion	Number of Responses (120)	Number of Responses	%
1	Yes		59	49.17
2	No		61	50.83
	Total		120	100.00

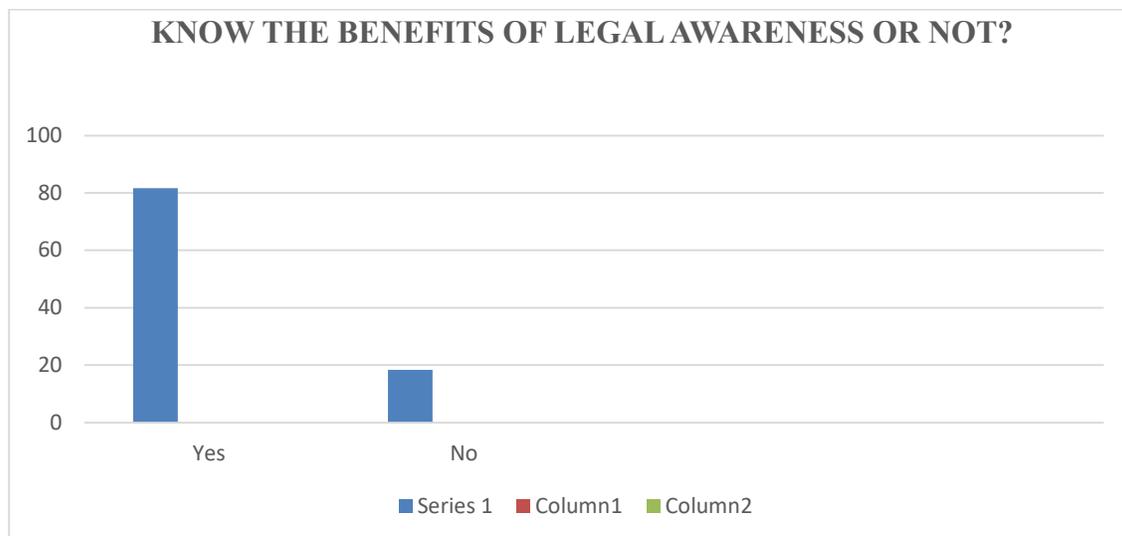
It may be observed from the table that majority of 50.83 % of poor people said that they do not know legal awareness. However, only 49.17 % of people have awareness/known about legal awareness respectively.

Do you know the benefits of legal awareness?

Legal awareness programmes will make the people to know about their fundamental rights, empower them and ascertain their legal rights and benefits and privileges guaranteed by the Indian constitution to live in dignity as citizens of the country. The poor people have difficulty in making use of law due to several reasons, including lack of legal awareness and lack of legal aid services The poor and the illiterate should be able to approach the Courts and their ignorance and poverty should not be an impediment in the ways of their obtaining Justice from the Courts.

Table No.: 4. Know the benefits of legal awareness or not?

S. No.	Opinion	Number of Responses (120)	Number of Responses	Total %
1	Yes		98	81.66
2	No		22	18.34
	Total		120	100.00





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The table No. indicates that majority of the members of the poor people 81.66 % have useful of the legal awareness programmes. Only 18.34 % of poor and weaker section people have not known the useful of legal awareness programmes to the people.

Types of Legal Awareness Programmes you have benefitted from?

Legal awareness programme is the dissemination of knowledge about legal issues and social practices that are affecting the rights of women in order to make the civil society to know about their responsibility and expose the struggle of the poor sections of the society, which are more helpful for public and also to collect the legal information. Analyses are given in the following table.

Table No.: 5. Legal Awareness Programmes you have benefitted from

S No	Opinion Number of Responses (120)	YES %	NO %	Total %
1	Individual legal awareness Programmes	27 22.5	93 77.5	120 100.00
2	Group legal awareness programmes	89 74.17	31 25.83	120 100.00
3	Community legal awareness programmes	62 51.67	58 48.33	120 100.00
4	The Social legal awareness programmes	75 62.5	45 37.5	120 100.00

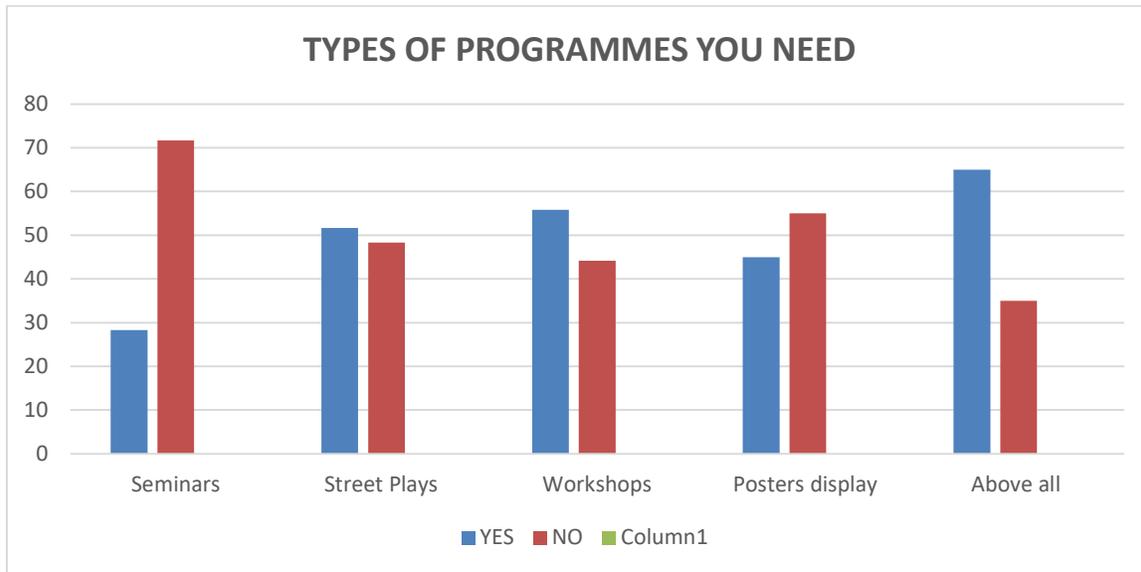
It is seen that the Group legal awareness programmes are the most effective in public to the poor people, 74.17 % followed by The Social legal awareness programmes 62.5 % rest of 51.67% and 22.5% poor and weaker section people stated that community legal awareness programmes and Individual legal awareness Programmes are useful to the poor section people. A good number of the poor community are supporting that the Group legal awareness programmes are useful at present situation.

what types of programmes did you need?

Through their paralegal services, volunteer organisations may assist these people in resolving their socio-legal issues and even contact the appropriate authorities to hear their complaints. Result is presented in the table.

Table No. 6. Types of Programmes you need

S No.	Opinion Number of Responses (120)	YES %	NO %	Total %
1	Seminars	34 28.33	86 71.67	120 100.00
2	Street Plays	62 51.67	58 48.33	120 100.00
3	Workshops	67 55.83	33 44.17	120 100.00
4	Posters display	54 45.00	66 55.00	120 100.00
5	Above all	78 65.00	42 35.00	120 100.00



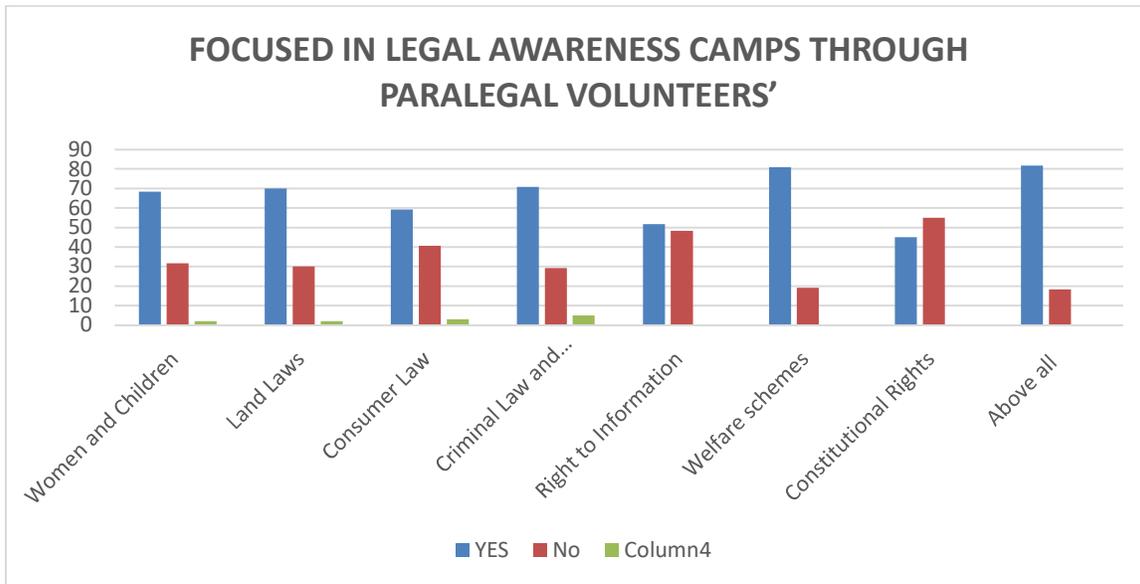
It may be observed from the above table that among various legal programmes 'above all' stood first with 65 % of the participants. It reveals that 55.83 % of poor people and weaker section people need workshop and street paly 55.83 and 51.67 % and. Only 45% of people need about the Posters display at public places for legal awareness programmes.

What laws and legal issues are focused in legal awareness camps through paralegal volunteers?

Legal awareness camps conducted by paralegal volunteers and law students focus on educating the public about basic legal rights and laws that affect daily life. Key topics include fundamental rights, free legal aid, family and child laws, women’s rights, labor laws, property rights, criminal procedures, and government welfare schemes.

Table No. 7. Issues Focused in legal awareness camps through Paralegal volunteers’/ Law Students

S. No.	Opinion	Number of Responses (120)	YES %	NO %	Total %
1	Women and Children	82	68.34	38	120
2	Land Laws	84	70.00	36	120
3	Consumer Law	71	59.16	49	120
4	Criminal Law and Civil laws	85	70.83	35	120
5	Right to Information	62	51.67	58	120
6	Welfare schemes	97	80.83	23	120
7	Constitutional Rights	54	45.00	66	120
8	Above all	98	81.66	22	120



The data analyses of responses show that the all the above 81.66%, 80.83 and 68.34 %of the people stated that all the above, welfare schemes aspects and women and children focused by the paralegal, It is further observed that 70.83 %and 70% people given next percent to Criminal Law and Civil laws and Land Laws, next preference is 59.16 and %, and 51.67% poor and weaker section people stated that consumer laws and righto information. Only 45 % people stated that focused on constitution Rights respectively.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Legal awareness and legal access are the two pillars of justice to sustain the society, to maintain the social order and to ensure the progress and wellbeing of the humanity. Legal services institutions under the auspicious of national legal service authority, New Delhi are committed to ensure legal awareness and legal access to all. The poor and weaker section of people must not be deprived, left, denied and neglected from the development of our state, country and worldwide on the basis of economic disabilities and other disabilities because without such persons, the entire development is not possible. Therefore, to protect such persons, the entire development is not possible. So, to protect such persons, many laws are in existence in India and also in the States of with special reference to states of south in India, for the interest and welfare of poor and weaker sections of people and vulnerable group of our society, subjecting to establish rule of law, hence, in accordance with the nature of this topic or research problem the relevant laws in connection with Legal- Aid and Para legal Services are being mentioned in this proposal of project.

Paralegal services are like first aid in legal matters just like a health clinic gives basic medical care. These services help people, especially those who are poor or from weaker communities, by guiding them in legal matters. They are often the first step toward getting justice. But today, paralegal services face many problems. These include social and economic issues, traditional customs, lack of education, poor awareness, and difficulty in reaching legal aid. The biggest problem is that legal and paralegal services are not always properly carried out by the authorities.

The present study suggests that awareness should be created by simplifying legal knowledge for the public. Paralegal volunteers should be associated with or employed by NGOs or community-based organizations (CBOs), which provide psychological and legal support to people involved in the criminal justice system.



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MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS OF DATA COLLECTION

The conclusions of the survey, conducted on 120 individuals from poorer sections of Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, indicate the level of legal aid awareness and highlight the need for creating greater legal awareness among marginalized communities. The degree of legal awareness was assessed in relation to the literacy levels of the participants. The survey included both literate and illiterate individuals, as well as women aged 25 to 50 years, to evaluate their understanding of legal aid and identify gaps where awareness initiatives may be required. The findings reveal that even among educated individuals, there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding legal rights and procedures, underscoring the importance of targeted legal education and awareness programs for all sections of society. The present research study has been conducted random sample survey among 120 poor people proportionately from Guntur Districts in Andhra Pradesh, India, to identify whether they have basic legal aid and awareness or not.

Findings of the survey according to the table No.1 60 % of poor rural people have not aware on legal awareness as there is law which is imposed and enforced by the State but 40% of people found that who have knowledge regarding the existence of law in the human society even. When people are ignorant about the existence of law, such people will have no scope to have legal aid and awareness. Almost poor and weaker .0section community they said that legal aid and legal awareness programmes have always need to the poor people and weaker section people for the society development. It is seen that the Group legal awareness programmes are the most effective in public to the poor people, 74.17 % followed by The Social legal awareness programmes 62.5 % rest of 51.67% and 22.5% poor and weaker section people stated that community legal awareness programmes and Individual legal awareness Programmes are useful to the poor section people. A good number of the poor community are supporting that the Group legal awareness programmes are useful at present situation. A good number of poor community are supporting the social legal awareness programmes is useful to aware on legal system and law.

It may be observed from the above table that among various legal programmes ‘above all’ stood first with 65 % of the participants. It reveals that 55.83 % of poor people and weaker section people need workshop and street paly 55.83 and 51.67 % and. Only 45% of people need about the Posters display at public places for legal awareness programmes. This suggests that while key social issues are being highlighted, broader legal topics still require more attention in awareness efforts targeted at poor and weaker sections of society.

Legal aid and awareness to the poor people will play an important role in all aspects of human life. Each and every poor people whether literate or illiterate urban or rural should know about exclusive enactments meant for them and also constitutional provisions which are specially meant for poor people welfare and freedom. Majority of poor people have no legal awareness to make use of the legal provisions specially meant for their special care to bring them in to main stream on par with all people to participate in all activities for the advancement of our country (India). It is observed that the legal awareness will empower individuals and promotes legal culture which is very essential to follow the law that adopted by the country. It controls the behaviour of people in the society. It helps to identify the rights and responsibilities of the citizens reciprocally and keeps away from violation of rights and duties of each other. It is also identified in this study that there is need to create the legal aid, awareness and legal culture as more poor people expressed their ignorance in regard legal aid and legal awareness.