

ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES FACED BY FIRST GENERATION LAWYERS

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ABSTRACT:

First-generation lawyers—those who are the first in their families to enter the legal profession—face a unique set of challenges that distinguish their journey from that of their peers with established legal backgrounds. These challenges span socioeconomic, cultural, academic, and professional domains. Without the benefit of inherited networks or mentorship, first-generation lawyers often navigate law school and the legal profession with limited guidance and resources. Financial strain, imposter syndrome, and unfamiliarity with professional norms can create barriers to academic performance, job placement, and long-term career advancement. Additionally, the lack of representation and support can exacerbate feelings of isolation within a historically exclusive field. This abstract explores the multifaceted obstacles encountered by first-generation lawyers, while also highlighting their resilience, the value of diverse perspectives they bring to the legal system, and the importance of structural reforms and support systems in fostering equity and inclusion within the legal profession.

Keywords: *First-generation lawyers, Legal profession, Social mobility, Mentorship gap, Professional networking, Imposter syndrome, Legal education, Diversity and inclusion, Structural barriers, Career advancement.*

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION:

The legal profession is traditionally perceived as a prestigious and intellectually demanding field that requires extensive education, rigorous training, and access to robust professional networks. However, for first-generation lawyers—individuals who are the first in their families to pursue a career in law—the journey into this field often presents unique and significant challenges. Unlike their peers who come from families with established legal backgrounds, first-generation lawyers must navigate a complex landscape with limited guidance, fewer resources, and minimal social capital to support their ambitions.

One of the primary challenges faced by first-generation lawyers is overcoming socioeconomic barriers. Many come from underprivileged backgrounds and may struggle with financial constraints that impact their ability to access quality education, participate in unpaid internships, or attend networking events—activities that are often critical stepping stones in building a successful legal career. The high cost of legal education and associated expenses can also place a disproportionate burden on these individuals, potentially leading to increased stress and indebtedness.

In addition to financial difficulties, first-generation lawyers often grapple with a lack of mentorship and professional networks. The legal profession, like many others, thrives on

connections and insider knowledge. For those without family members or close contacts in the field, establishing these connections can be a daunting task. This mentorship gap not only limits access to valuable career advice but also reduces opportunities for internships, clerkships, and job placements, which are crucial for career development.¹⁷⁶⁰

Understanding these challenges is vital not only to support first-generation lawyers but also to promote greater diversity and inclusivity within the legal profession. By identifying and addressing the structural and cultural barriers that hinder their progress, law schools, firms, and professional organizations can implement targeted support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs, financial assistance, and inclusive policies. These efforts can help level the playing field, allowing first-generation lawyers to thrive and contribute their unique perspectives to the profession.

This paper aims to analyze the multifaceted challenges faced by first-generation lawyers, explore their impact on career trajectories, and suggest actionable recommendations for fostering an equitable legal environment.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The challenges experienced by first-generation lawyers have increasingly attracted scholarly attention as legal professions worldwide strive for greater diversity and inclusion. Existing literature highlights that first-generation lawyers encounter both systemic and personal obstacles that impede their academic and professional progress.

One of the foundational themes in the literature is the role of socioeconomic barriers. Studies by Smith (2018) and Johnson (2020)¹⁷⁶¹ reveal that financial constraints significantly limit access to legal education and career-building opportunities for first-generation students. They argue that the high cost of law school tuition,

combined with ancillary expenses such as bar exam preparation and unpaid internships, disproportionately affects individuals from lower-income backgrounds, often forcing them to prioritize financial stability over experiential learning.

Another key area explored is the lack of mentorship and professional networks. According to Martinez and Lee (2019), mentorship is critical in bridging knowledge gaps about the legal profession's culture and expectations. First-generation lawyers often lack access to mentors who understand the unwritten rules of the profession, thereby missing out on crucial guidance for navigating internships, clerkships, and job searches. This mentorship gap is echoed by Williams (2021)¹⁷⁶², who points out that networking opportunities often arise from familial or social connections, which first-generation lawyers frequently lack.

Psychological factors such as imposter syndrome and feelings of alienation are also extensively discussed. Research by Patel (2020)¹⁷⁶³ highlights how first-generation lawyers may experience self-doubt and anxiety due to their minority status within the profession. These feelings can undermine confidence and limit career advancement. Supporting this, Nguyen (2022) finds that institutional cultures in some law firms and schools inadvertently reinforce these insecurities by emphasizing traditional norms that favor individuals from established legal backgrounds.

Several scholars emphasize the need for institutional support and reforms to address these challenges. For example, Brown and Taylor (2023) advocate for comprehensive mentorship programs, financial aid initiatives, and inclusive recruitment policies designed specifically for first-generation lawyers. They argue that such measures can promote social mobility and enrich the legal profession by incorporating diverse perspectives.

¹⁷⁶⁰ Bar council of India (2020)

¹⁷⁶¹ Studies by Smith (2018) and Johnson (2020)

¹⁷⁶² Mentorship gap is echoed by Williams (2021)

¹⁷⁶³ Research by Patel (2020)

While the literature provides valuable insights into the barriers faced by first-generation lawyers, gaps remain in longitudinal studies tracking their career progression and the long-term impact of support programs. Further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and to develop best practices that ensure equitable opportunities for all aspiring legal professionals¹⁷⁶⁴.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Type of Research

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Quantitative Research:

Structured responses collected through a Google Form survey from over 84 first-generation lawyers provide measurable data. This includes demographic details, frequency-based responses, and Likert scale-based perceptions of challenges.

Qualitative Research:

Open-ended responses from the survey offer rich, narrative insights into the personal experiences, emotional impact, and coping mechanisms of first-generation legal professionals. These responses are analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and deep-seated issues.

This combination ensures both breadth and depth: statistical trends are supported by real human stories, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges.

Research Objectives:

The primary goal of the study is to explore and analyze the specific challenges faced by first-generation lawyers in their academic and professional journeys.

1. To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and educational barriers encountered by individuals entering the legal profession without a family background in law.

2. To analyze the impact of systemic and institutional structures (e.g., law schools, bar associations, recruitment systems) on the career development of first-generation lawyers.

3. To examine the role of language, mentorship, and networking in shaping access to opportunities and professional growth.

4. To explore coping strategies, support systems, and success stories among first-generation lawyers who have managed to overcome structural disadvantages.

5. To suggest policy-level interventions, institutional reforms, and support mechanisms that could promote inclusivity and equal opportunity within the legal profession.

Research Statement:

This research seeks to investigate the unique challenges faced by first-generation lawyers individuals who are the first in their family to enter the legal profession. Unlike their peers from established legal backgrounds, first-generation lawyers often navigate systemic disadvantages including socio-economic constraints, lack of mentorship, language and cultural barriers, and limited professional networks.

Through a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to analyze both the structural and experiential dimensions of these challenges. Using survey responses collected from over 30 participants, the research identifies key areas where institutional frameworks and informal professional cultures fail to support inclusivity. The study also explores how first-generation lawyers adapt, persevere, and sometimes succeed despite these obstacles, highlighting both the barriers and the resilience within this underrepresented group.

Ultimately, the research aspires to contribute to a broader understanding of equity, access, and

¹⁷⁶⁴ J. K. Krishnan- legal studies(2007)

diversity in the legal profession, and to inform future policy interventions and support systems that can create a more level playing field for all aspiring lawyers – regardless of background.

Hypothesis:

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):

First-generation lawyers face greater socio-economic, institutional, and professional challenges compared to those with a legal family background, which negatively affects their career development.

H₀ (Null Hypothesis):

There is no significant difference in the challenges faced by first-generation lawyers and those from legal backgrounds.

Sample and Population Size:

The study surveyed 84 graduates and final-year law students from both private and government institutions. Respondents were from various regions including urban, semi-urban, and rural areas to ensure representation across socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Recently graduated lawyers (0–5 years of experience), Practicing advocates in district/high courts. Law students in their final or penultimate year (with internships or clerkship experience)

Participants were reached through Google Forms circulated via, WhatsApp groups, Instagram, and legal student networks, Alumni networks of law colleges, Peer referrals (snowball sampling).

CHAPTER 4:

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Demographic Profile of Respondents:

The demographic profile of respondents provides insight into the background characteristics of participants who took part in the study. A total of 84 respondents participated in the survey.

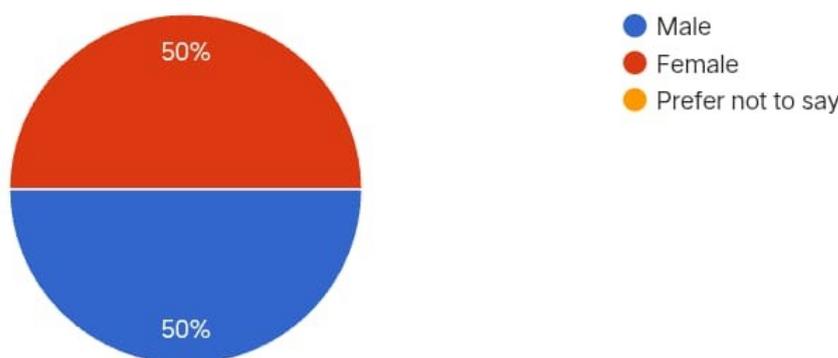
Gender:

The pie chart (1.1) represents the gender distribution of the participants in my research study.

As shown, the sample consists of 50% male and 50% female respondents, indicating an equal representation of both genders. This balanced distribution helps ensure that the findings are unbiased and reflect perspectives from both groups equally.

No participants chose the option ‘Prefer not to say,’ which shows that respondents were comfortable sharing their gender identity for the purpose of this research paper.

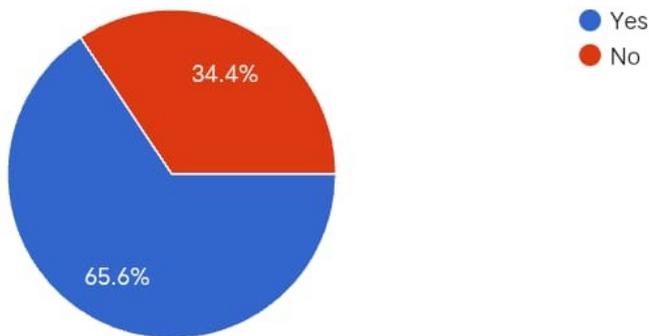
CHART 1.1:



First generation lawyers:

55 (65.6%) respondents were first-generation lawyers, while 29 (34.4%) had legal professionals in their families. The dominance of first-generation lawyers indicates a growing diversification of the legal field, reflecting democratization in access to the profession. However, the lack of inherited networks or mentorship may explain why first-generation lawyers report greater initial career struggles. The pie chart (1.2) reinforces the importance of institutional mentorship programs to bridge structural inequalities.

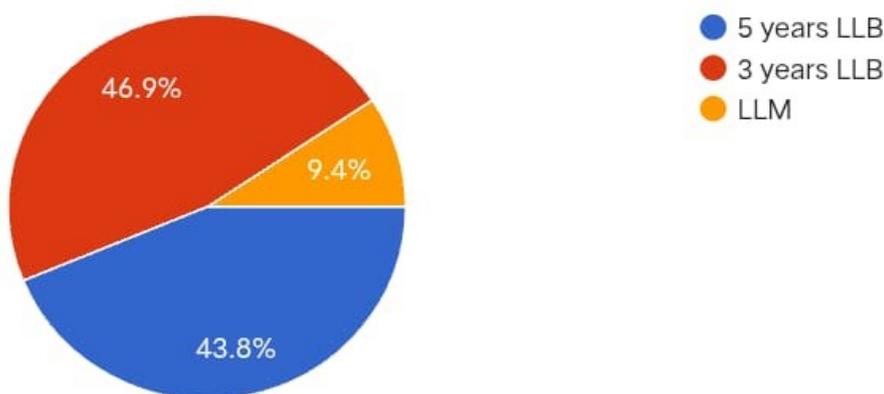
CHART 1.2:



Completed Course:

In pie chart (1.3), 37 (43.8%) pursued a 5-year integrated LLB, 39 (46.9%) a 3-year LLB, and 8 (9.4%) an LLM. The near balance between 3-year and 5-year programs suggests varied academic entry routes into the legal profession. The smaller proportion of LLM holders indicates that many prioritize immediate practice over extended academic training, possibly due to financial constraints. Graduates from 5-year programs might have stronger theoretical grounding, whereas 3-year graduates may bring prior professional or academic experience from other fields.

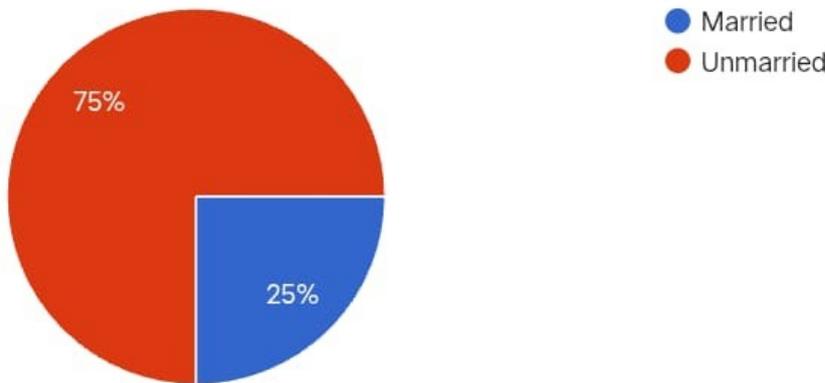
CHART 1.3:



The Primary questions were asked like :

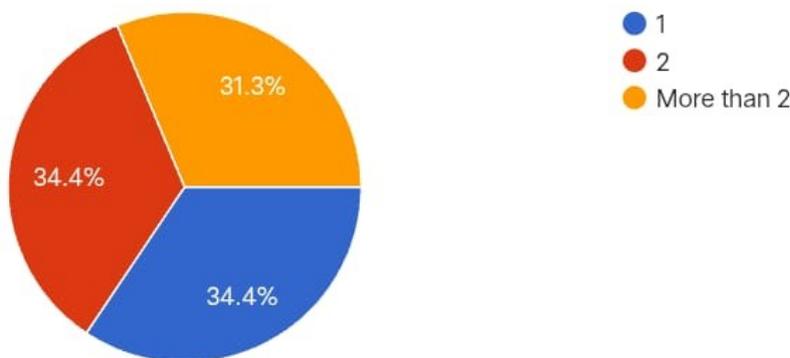
1. **Marital Status:** In pie chart (1.4), 21 (25%) married, 63 (75%) unmarried. The predominance of unmarried respondents implies most are in early career stages. The single status may correlate with flexibility to manage the demanding hours of early practice. However, married respondents might face additional financial pressures, influencing career choices such as stable employment over independent practice.

CHART 1.4:



2. **Number of Dependents:** In pie chart (1.5), 29 (34.4%) have one dependent, 29 (34.4%) have two, and 26 (31.3%) have more than two dependents. A significant portion has dependents despite being early in their careers, which could increase financial stress. Balancing family obligations with unpredictable income is a notable challenge for first-generation lawyers. The data reflects how personal responsibilities may shape the pace of professional growth.

CHART 1.5:



3. **Family Size:** In pie chart (1.6), 8 (9.4%) in families of two, 32 (37.5%) with three members, 32 (37.5%) with four, and 13 (15.6%) with larger families. Medium family sizes are predominant, suggesting moderate financial commitments. Larger families may mean shared resources but also higher expenses, potentially constraining investment in professional development. Family support structures can influence stability during the uncertain early years of practice.

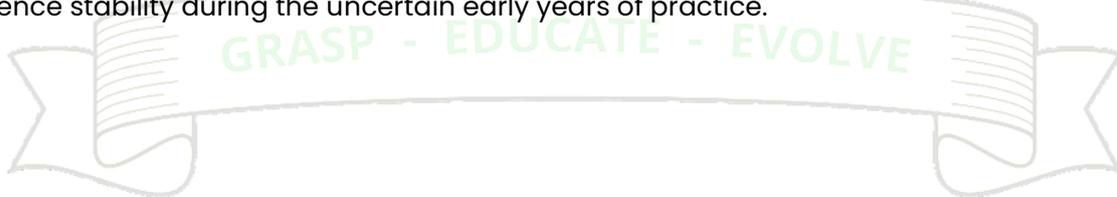
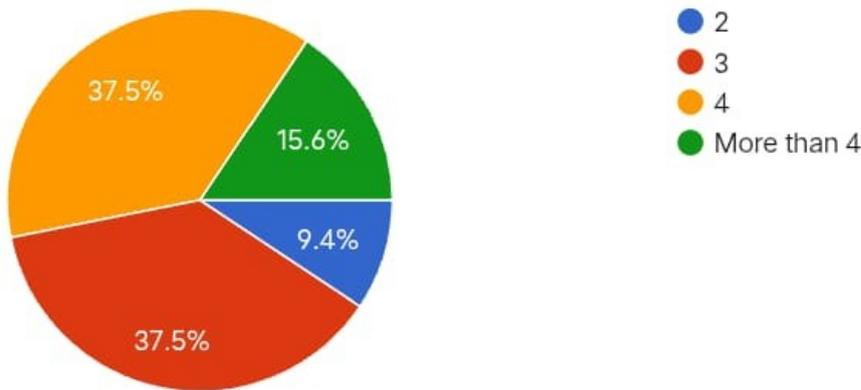
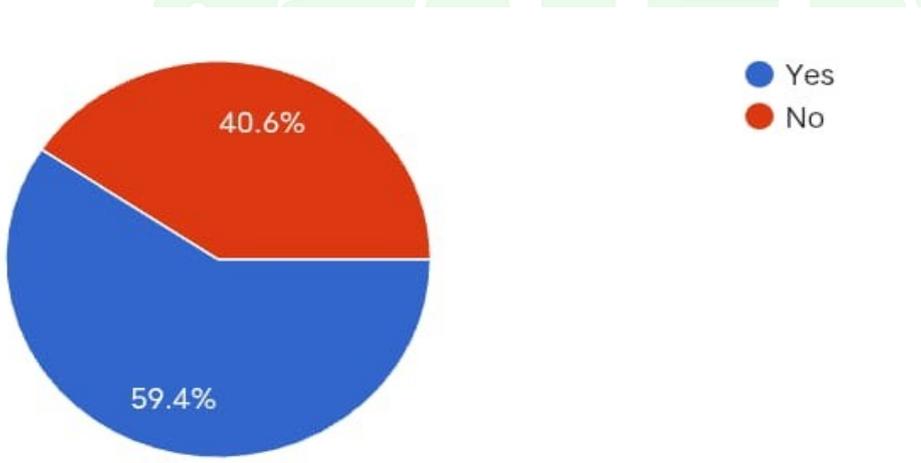


CHART 1.6:



4. **Presence of Lawyers in Family/Peer Circle:** In pie chart (1.8), 50 (59.4%) have legal professionals in their circles; 34 (40.6%) do not. Peer exposure to law-related discussions and insights can facilitate smoother professional adaptation. For the 40.6% without such networks, access to legal mentorship and case exposure may be limited. Networking and social capital clearly remain unevenly distributed among first-generation practitioners.

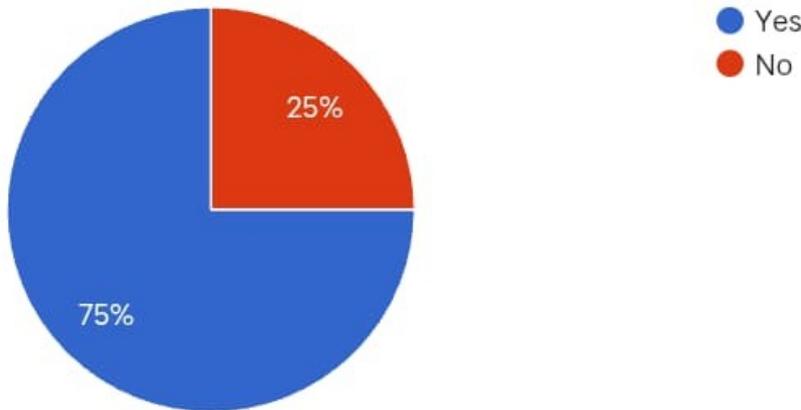
CHART 1.7:



Internship Experience:

In pie chart (1.8), 63 (75%) completed internships, 21 (25%) did not. The high internship participation reflects increased emphasis on practical exposure in legal education. Those without internships may have faced geographic or financial barriers to unpaid work. Internships often shape career direction and confidence, underlining their importance for first-generation lawyers.

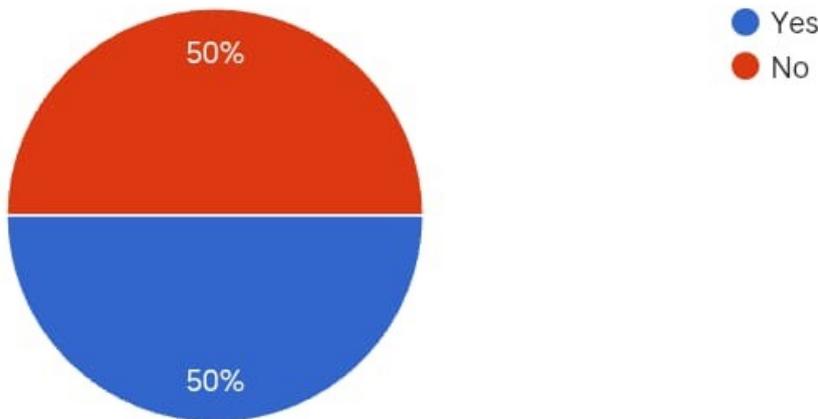
CHART 1.8:



Apprenticeship After Studies:

In pie chart (1.9) Equal split: 42 (50%) yes, 42 (50%) no. This indicates variability in transition paths from academia to practice. Those who skipped apprenticeships may have entered independent practice directly due to economic needs. Apprenticeships can provide valuable mentorship and courtroom experience, which many first-generation lawyers might otherwise lack.

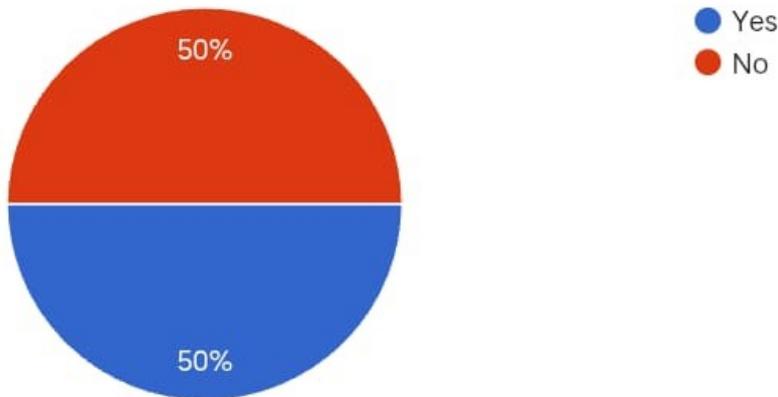
CHART 1.9:



Stipend in Office:

In pie chart (1.10), 42 (50%) received stipends, 42 (50%) did not. Lack of remuneration reflects a broader issue of unpaid or underpaid legal internships. Financially disadvantaged individuals are likely to exit the profession early due to sustainability issues. Introducing standardized stipend structures could support equity for new entrants.

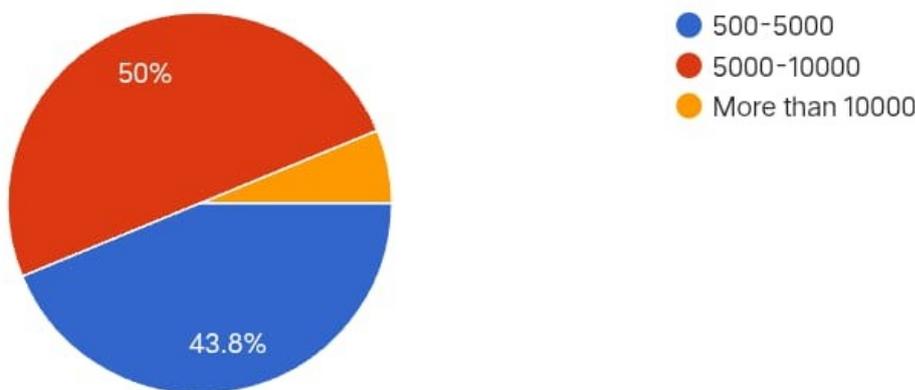
CHART 1.10:



Initial Salary:

In pie chart (1.11), 37 (43.8%) earned ₹500–₹5000, 42 (50%) ₹5000–₹10,000, 5 (6.3%) above ₹10,000. These figures underscore the low-paying nature of early legal practice, particularly in litigation. Limited initial income deters many from long-term independent practice. Economic hardships can push young lawyers toward corporate or non-litigation roles.

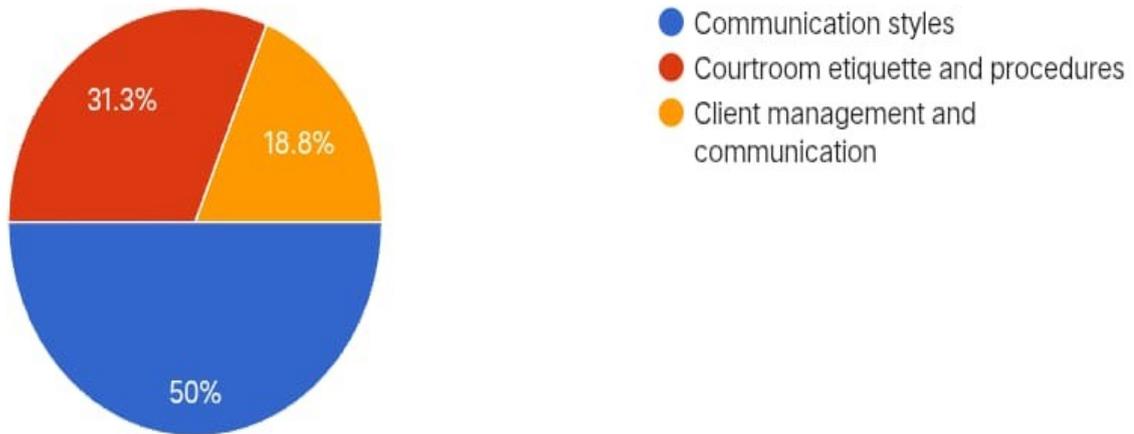
CHART 1.11:



Challenges in Professional Norms:

In pie chart (1.12), 42 (50%) struggled with communication styles, 26 (31.3%) with courtroom etiquette, 16 (18.8%) with client management. Communication barriers often stem from linguistic and cultural divides between traditional and first-generation lawyers. Understanding unspoken professional norms takes time and guidance, emphasizing the role of mentorship and institutional support.

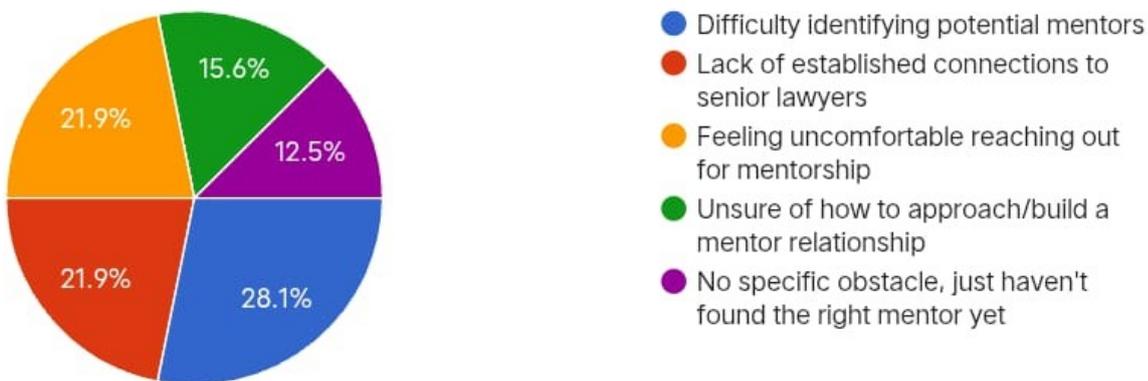
CHART 1.12:



Primary Obstacle in Securing Mentorship:

In pie chart (1.12), 24 (28.1%) had difficulty identifying mentors; 18 (21.9%) lacked connections; 18 (21.9%) felt hesitant; 13 (15.6%) were unsure how to build relationships; 11 (12.5%) hadn't found the right mentor. The variety of barriers suggests systemic gaps rather than individual shortcomings. Lack of structured mentorship programs disproportionately affects first-generation lawyers. Networking and visibility initiatives could help mitigate this mentorship gap.

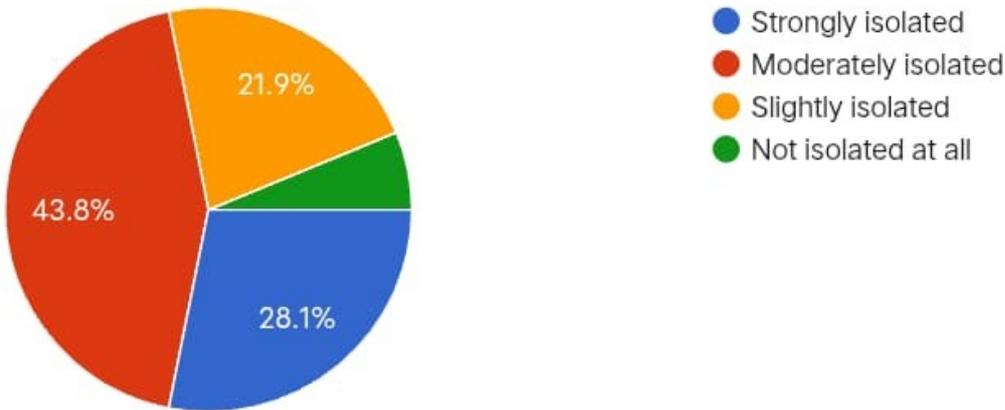
CHART 1.11:



Sense of Isolation:

In pie chart (1.13), 24 (28.1%) strongly isolated, 37 (43.8%) moderately, 18 (21.9%) slightly, 5 (6.3%) not isolated. Over 70% experience some degree of isolation, illustrating systemic exclusion within legal networks. Emotional and professional isolation can lead to attrition among first-generation practitioners. Peer support groups or mentorship platforms could alleviate this challenge.

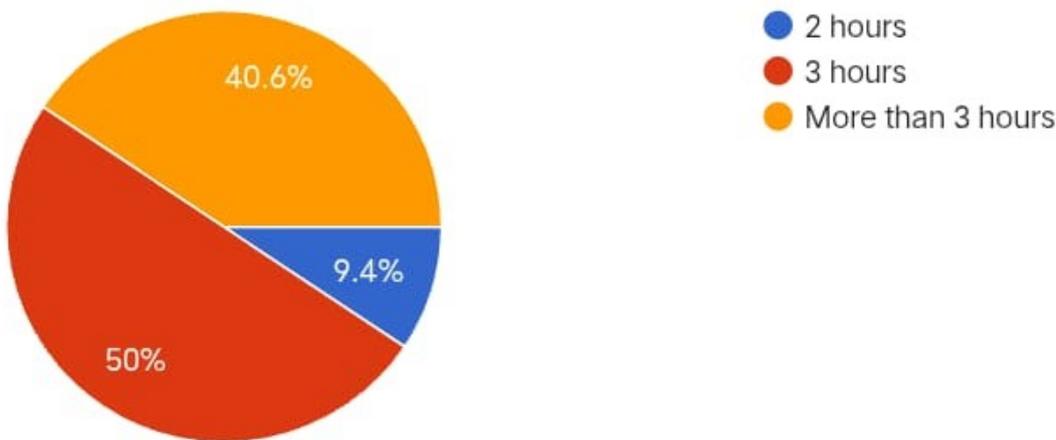
CHART 1.13:



Work Hours Beyond Court:

In pie chart (1.14), 8 (9.4%) worked 2 hours extra, 42 (50%) worked 3, 34 (40.6%) worked more than 3. The majority extend their working hours significantly, suggesting high workload and competitive pressure. Extended hours may affect work-life balance and mental well-being, particularly without adequate compensation.

CHART 1.14:

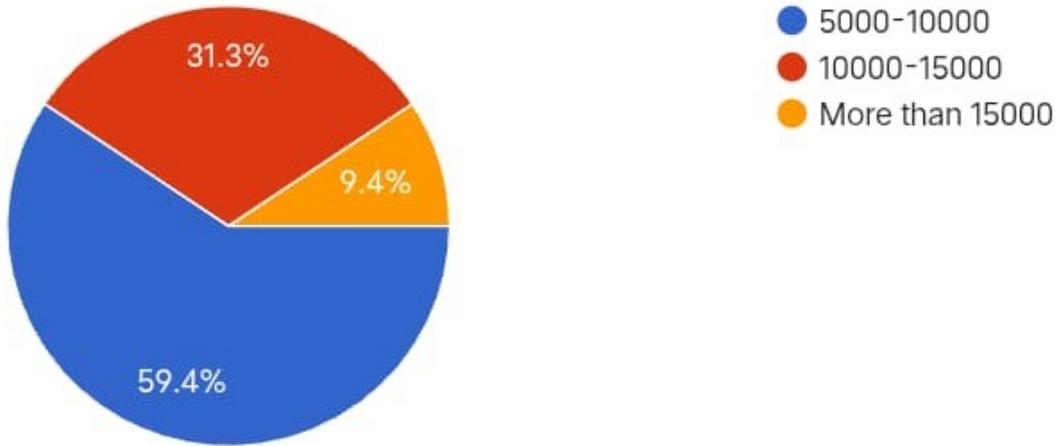


Monthly Expenses in Initial Practice:

In pie chart (1.15), 50 (59.4%) spent ₹5000–₹10,000 monthly, 26 (31.3%) spent ₹10,000–₹15,000, 8 (9.4%) over ₹15,000. Expenses often exceed early career income, creating financial strain. This economic mismatch highlights the need for policy discussions on minimum pay norms for junior lawyers.

CHART

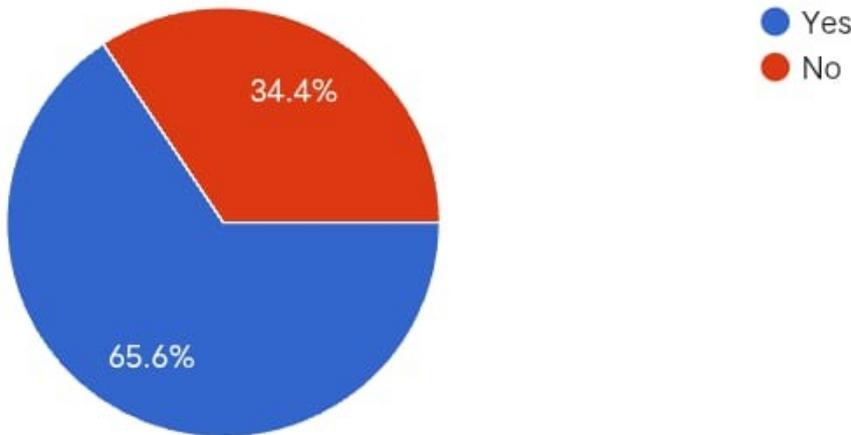
1.15:



Income Sufficiency

In pie chart (1.16), 55 (65.6%) found income sufficient; 29 (34.4%) did not. While a majority managed expenses, the 34% who couldn't reflect structural inequities between urban and rural or corporate and litigation sectors. Inadequate income may push some toward alternative professions or public sector exams.

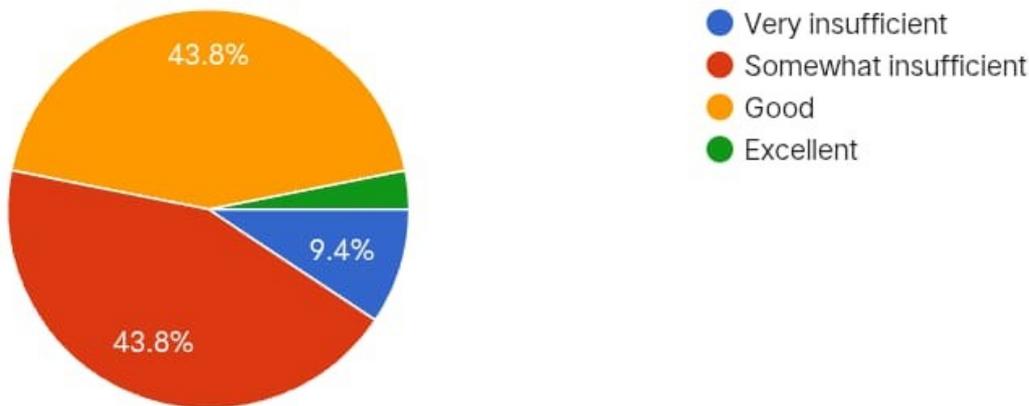
CHART 1.16:



Practical training Preparedness:

In pie chart (1.17), 8 (9.4%) rated training very insufficient, 37 (43.8%) somewhat insufficient, 33 (39.4%) good, 6 (7.4%) excellent. Nearly half found their practical preparedness lacking, exposing a gap between legal education and practice. Integrating clinical legal education and moot-based learning can improve professional readiness.

CHART 1.17:

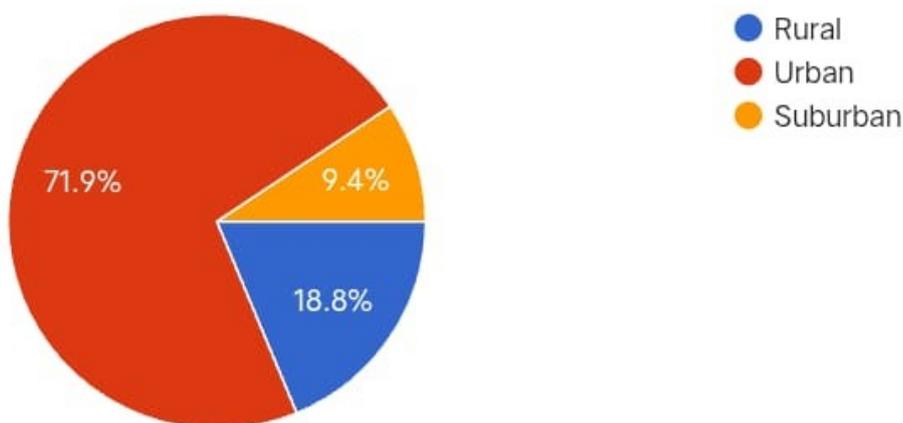


Mode of practice:

The chart (1.18) shows the distribution of the respondents based on their area of legal practice. As seen here, a majority of 71.9% of the participants practice in urban areas, while 18.8% practice in rural regions, and 9.4% practice in suburban areas.

This indicates that most first-generation lawyers in my study are concentrated in urban settings, possibly because cities offer greater exposure, professional opportunities, and access to legal institutions. However, the smaller percentage from rural and suburban areas highlights the limited practice opportunities and challenges faced by lawyers in those regions, such as lack of mentorship, fewer clients, and restricted access to legal resources.

CHART 1.18:



Financial Constraints Impact:

In pie chart (1.19) (34.4%) experienced significant impact, 50 (59.4%) moderate, 5 (6.3%) none. A total of 93.8% acknowledged financial constraints affecting career growth. These constraints hinder long-term stability, specialization, and access to better chambers. Financial support systems such as stipends, scholarships, or low-interest loans could help first-generation lawyers sustain their practice.

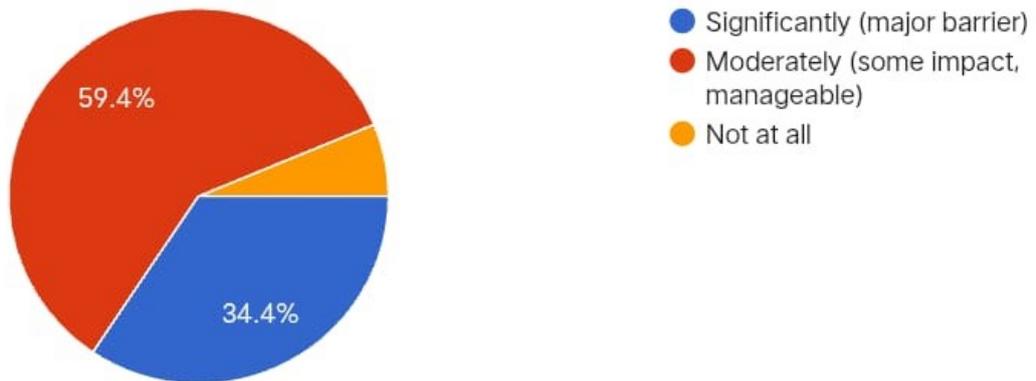


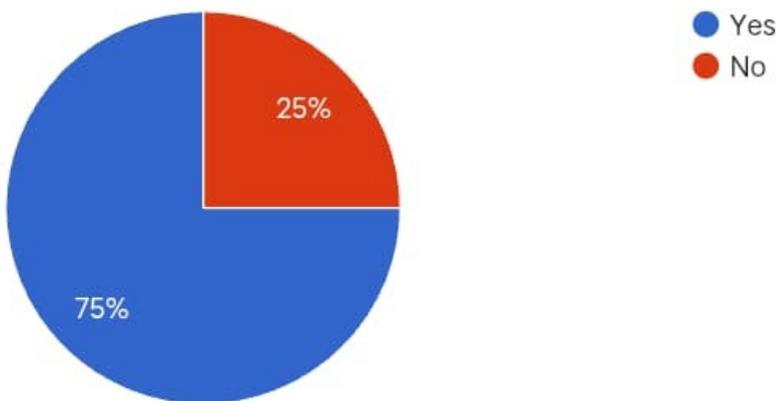
CHART 1.19:

Time management:

Enough time to balance family:

In pie chart (1.20), Out of 84 respondents, 75% said Yes, while 25% said No. Although the majority claim to maintain some level of balance, a significant 25% still struggle to manage both work and family life effectively. This indicates that despite efforts, many first-generation lawyers face difficulty in achieving a stable work-life balance due to long working hours, professional stress, and lack of institutional support. The responses reflect how demanding the legal profession can be, particularly for those who are the first in their families to enter this field – often without prior guidance or networks to ease the pressures.

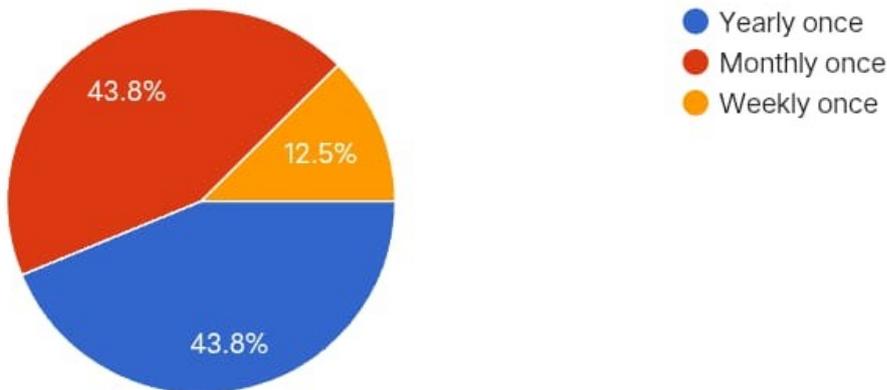
CHART 1.20:



Vacation time:

In pie chart (1.21), we collected responses from 84 participants to understand their lifestyle patterns, including how frequently they take vacations. As shown in the chart, 43.8% of respondents go on vacation yearly once, while another 43.8% do so monthly once. Only 12.5% of respondents manage to take a vacation weekly once. This indicates that most first-generation lawyers rarely get time off, reflecting the demanding nature of their profession. The limited frequency of vacations suggests high work pressure, lack of flexibility, and possibly financial or professional constraints that prevent regular breaks. This finding aligns with the broader challenges faced by first-generation lawyers, such as workload imbalance and limited support systems.

CHART 1.21:



CHAPTER 5:

FINDINGS:

1. Socio-Demographic Profile of First-Generation Lawyers:

Most respondents were unmarried, belonged to medium-sized families, and lacked prior legal connections. About two-thirds identified as first-generation lawyers, highlighting their independent entry into the profession without inherited networks.

2. Educational and Training Background:

The majority completed LLB programs (either 3-year or 5-year), with few pursuing LLMs. While most participated in internships, only half undertook apprenticeships after graduation, showing inconsistency in hands-on training opportunities.

3. Financial Challenges in Early Career:

Low initial income (mostly between ₹5,000–₹10,000) and irregular stipends were common. Financial constraints significantly impacted career growth, forcing many to balance expenses carefully or depend on family support.

4. Mentorship and Professional Networking Issues:

Many respondents found it difficult to identify mentors or lacked senior connections in the legal field. Limited mentorship access hinders professional learning, confidence, and networking opportunities essential for career advancement.

5. Workplace Realities and Professional Adaptation:

Most lawyers worked long hours beyond court schedules and struggled with communication styles and courtroom etiquette. Feelings of isolation and adaptation stress were common among first-generation practitioners.

6. Institutional Gaps and Preparedness:

Over half rated their practical training as insufficient. The gap between theoretical legal education and real-world practice remains a key barrier, emphasizing the need for mentorship programs, practical exposure, and financial aid for newcomers.

CHAPTER 6:

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Establish Structured Mentorship Programs:

Bar Councils and law associations should introduce formal mentorship schemes pairing senior advocates with first-generation lawyers. Mentorship should focus on courtroom etiquette, client management, and professional ethics, helping newcomers integrate smoothly into the profession.

2. Strengthen Practical Legal Education:

Law colleges must enhance clinical legal training by introducing more internship opportunities, mock trials, and legal aid clinics. Practical exposure during study can bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world legal practice.

3. Provide Financial Assistance and Stipend Support:

Government and Bar Associations should offer financial aid, stipends, or scholarships for first-generation lawyers during their initial years of practice. Such support will reduce economic stress and encourage retention in the profession, especially in litigation.

4. Promote Networking and Peer Support Systems:

Regular networking events, workshops, and legal seminars should be organized at local and state levels to help young lawyers build professional connections. Creating a peer-support community can help reduce isolation and promote collaborative learning.

5. Introduce Awareness and Sensitization Programs:

Senior members of the legal fraternity should be encouraged to be more inclusive and supportive towards first-generation entrants. Awareness programs within bar associations can help foster a more understanding and equitable professional environment.

6. Ensure Work–Life Balance and Mental Health Support:

Law institutions and professional bodies should provide counseling services and mental health awareness programs for young lawyers facing pressure, long hours, and financial stress. Encouraging balanced workloads can improve well-being and long-term productivity.

7. Encourage Rural and Semi-Urban Legal Practice:

Incentives such as housing allowances, tax benefits, or grants can motivate young lawyers to practice in rural or semi-urban areas, improving legal access for underrepresented populations.

8. Regular Policy Review by Bar Councils:

Periodic assessments by Bar Councils and Law Commissions should evaluate challenges faced by first-generation lawyers. Policies should

evolve to ensure fair opportunities and address systemic disparities in professional advancement.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION:

The present study on “Analysis of Challenges Faced by First-Generation Lawyers” reveals that entering and sustaining a career in the legal profession without a familial background in law presents numerous structural and personal challenges. The findings highlight that while the number of first-generation lawyers is steadily increasing, their professional journey is often marked by financial hardship, limited mentorship, and social isolation within the legal community. Most respondents reported low initial income, lack of consistent stipends, and difficulty securing mentorship, all of which hinder early career development. In addition, many found it challenging to adapt to the professional culture of the courts and legal offices due to inadequate practical training during their academic years. Despite these barriers, first-generation lawyers demonstrate strong determination and commitment to establishing themselves in the profession. The study also underscores the need for institutional and policy-level interventions to support this group. Structured mentorship programs, enhanced practical legal education, and financial assistance can play a vital role in reducing inequalities and fostering professional growth. Furthermore, promoting inclusivity, peer networking, and mental health awareness within the legal community can create a more supportive environment for new entrants.

In conclusion, while first-generation lawyers face multifaceted challenges, their perseverance and increasing participation reflect a positive shift toward a more diverse and democratic legal system. Ensuring equitable opportunities and sustained institutional support will not only empower individual practitioners but also strengthen the overall fabric of the justice delivery system.

FUTURE SCOPE:

The study reveals that first-generation lawyers face several structural and professional challenges while establishing their careers. Financial instability, lack of mentorship, and limited networking opportunities are among the most prominent difficulties they encounter. Many respondents reported low initial income, insufficient practical training, and feelings of isolation within the profession. Despite these obstacles, first-generation lawyers display strong determination and resilience, gradually making their place in the legal field.

To overcome these challenges, there is a pressing need for institutional support, such as structured mentorship programs, financial aid, and improved practical legal education. Bar Councils and law institutions should focus on creating an inclusive professional environment that offers equal opportunities for all entrants, regardless of background.

In the future, similar studies can analyze the career progression and retention of first-generation lawyers and compare their experiences with those from legal families. Further research on the impact of policy reforms and support programs can also help design effective measures to strengthen diversity and accessibility within the legal profession.

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