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A STUDY ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE: THE ECONOMIC BARRIERS OF LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR THE POOR

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ABSTRACT

Access to justice is a cornerstone of democratic societies and the rule of law. However, for economically marginalized communities, this ideal often remains out of reach. This study investigates the economic barriers that hinder the poor from accessing legal representation and participating meaningfully in the justice system. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining statistical analysis of legal aid accessibility with in-depth interviews of individuals who have faced financial constraints in legal proceedings. Key findings reveal that the prohibitive costs of hiring private legal counsel, coupled with the limited capacity and inconsistent quality of publicly funded legal aid services, create significant hurdles for low-income individuals. Additionally, indirect costs—such as transportation, time off work, and bureaucratic complexity—further discourage engagement with the legal system. The study also examines the intersectionality of poverty with other vulnerabilities, including gender, race, and rural residency, which amplify the barriers to justice. Despite existing legal aid policies and frameworks, the current systems often fail to meet the growing demand or ensure timely and effective representation. The paper concludes with policy recommendations aimed at increasing state investment in legal aid, incentivizing pro bono legal services, enhancing legal literacy, and exploring alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that are more accessible to the poor. By addressing these economic barriers, the study emphasizes the urgent need for structural reforms to uphold the principle of equal justice for all.

KEYWORDS: Access to justice, legal representation, economic barriers, legal aid, poverty, social inequality, justice system, pro bono services, legal literacy, alternative dispute resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Access to justice is a cornerstone of a fair and democratic society. However, for millions living in poverty, legal representation remains a distant ideal. Economic barriers often dictate who gets justice and who does not. This disparity undermines the rule of law and perpetuates systemic inequality. Legal systems, though designed to protect rights, can be prohibitively expensive. For the poor, the cost of hiring a lawyer can outweigh the potential benefits. Court fees, documentation charges, and procedural complexities add to the burden. As a result, many avoid legal action altogether, forfeiting their rights silently. Public defenders and legal aid services are often underfunded and overstretched. Quality of representation in such cases is frequently compromised. The lack of economic resources directly impacts one's ability to seek redress. This creates a two-tiered justice system—one for the wealthy, another for the poor. The issue is global, affecting both developed and developing nations alike. Legal empowerment remains a distant goal for marginalized communities. Barriers to access reinforce cycles of poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability. Addressing these barriers requires systemic reform and policy innovation. Efforts must go beyond legal aid to tackle structural and economic inequities. This study explores how economic challenges obstruct access to legal representation. It investigates the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to this crisis. Ultimately, it seeks to advocate for a more inclusive and equitable justice system.

Statement of problem

Access to justice is a fundamental right enshrined in both national constitutions and international human rights instruments. However, in practice, this right is far from universally realized—particularly for economically disadvantaged populations. A significant portion of the poor is unable to secure adequate legal representation due to financial constraints, resulting in unequal treatment before the law and a widening justice gap. While legal aid services exist to mitigate this issue, they are often underfunded, overburdened, or inconsistently available, leading to delays, inadequate defense, or total exclusion from the legal process.

Moreover, the high cost of legal consultation, court fees, and other related expenses acts as a deterrent for low-income individuals to pursue or defend legal claims. Indirect barriers, such

as lack of legal awareness, fear of retaliation, and logistical challenges like transportation or time away from work, compound the issue. These obstacles not only deprive the poor of their legal rights but also undermine public confidence in the justice system.

The problem, therefore, lies not in the absence of legal frameworks but in their inaccessibility due to economic factors. This study seeks to critically examine these barriers and assess the extent to which economic disadvantage impairs meaningful access to justice. It also aims to identify policy gaps and suggest sustainable, equitable solutions to ensure that justice is not a privilege for the few, but a right for all.

Review of literature

A comprehensive study by **Donald and Sepúlveda (2020)**¹ emphasizes that individuals living in poverty face significant challenges in accessing justice due to financial constraints, lack of legal awareness, and complex judicial processes. These barriers perpetuate a cycle of social exclusion and impunity, necessitating a human rights-based approach to reform legal aid systems.

In the United States, economic disparities in legal representation are profound. High costs associated with private attorneys and underfunded public defender programs create a justice gap, particularly affecting marginalized communities. Pro bono services and nonprofit organizations play a crucial role in mitigating these disparities, though challenges such as resource limitations persist.

Legal Aid as a Fundamental Right in India²-In India, Article 39-A of the Constitution mandates free legal aid to ensure justice is not denied due to economic or other disabilities. Despite this constitutional provision, only a small fraction of eligible individuals access legal aid services, primarily due to underfunding and inadequate infrastructure. The Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, aims to bridge this gap, but challenges remain in effective implementation

McQuoid-Mason (2020)³ advocates for a holistic approach to legal aid, particularly in developing countries like South Africa. This model integrates legal assistance with social services, addressing the multifaceted needs of the poor and enhancing their ability to navigate the justice system effectively

Bellsmith et al. (2022)⁴ identify additional barriers to justice for the poor, including lack of legal awareness, cultural and language differences, and systemic disempowerment. These factors compound the challenges faced by low-income individuals, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms to ensure equitable access to justice.

Research gap

Despite growing academic and policy interest in the concept of access to justice, there remains a significant research gap concerning the economic barriers that prevent the poor from securing adequate legal representation. Most existing studies tend to focus on legal frameworks, institutional structures, or statistical data, with limited attention to the lived experiences of those directly affected by these barriers. The voices of individuals from low-income backgrounds—particularly those from rural or marginalized communities—are often underrepresented in the literature, leaving a gap in understanding how poverty, location, and social exclusion intersect to affect access to justice. Furthermore, while legal aid schemes have been introduced in many jurisdictions, there is a lack of empirical evaluation on their effectiveness, reach, and quality from the perspective of the beneficiaries. Intersectional challenges, such as the compounded difficulties faced by women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, are also not adequately addressed. In addition, emerging technological solutions like AI-driven legal tools and online legal services are being promoted as cost-effective alternatives, yet little research has been done to examine whether such innovations are truly accessible or beneficial to the economically disadvantaged. This study seeks to address these gaps by providing a more nuanced, people-centered analysis of how economic constraints continue to hinder equal access to justice, and by identifying the disconnect between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities.

Objectivity of the study

1. To identify and analyze the primary economic barriers that prevent low-income individuals from accessing legal representation in both civil and criminal matters.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness and reach of existing legal aid schemes and public legal services in addressing the legal needs of the poor.
3. To examine the lived experiences of economically disadvantaged individuals in navigating the legal system, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts both doctrinal and non-doctrinal methodologies to offer a comprehensive analysis of on on Access to Justice: The Economic Barriers of Legal Representation for the Poor.

Sample size

The sample size for this study consists of 20 respondents, selected using a stratified random

sampling method to ensure that various demographic and socio-economic groups are represented in the data.

Jurisdiction of the Research

This research will focus on India as the jurisdiction, as it specifically aims to analyse the Cybercrime in India Its legal challenges and law enforcement responses

Duration of the Research

The duration of this research is 1 month, during which time data were collected, analysed, and the findings were synthesized into a comprehensive report.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value in highlighting one of the most pressing issues in the legal and social justice landscape—the persistent economic barriers that prevent the poor from accessing legal representation and, ultimately, justice. In democratic societies where the rule of law is foundational, justice should be equally accessible to all, regardless of income or social status. However, in practice, the inability to afford legal services often results in denial of rights, wrongful convictions, and civil injustices that disproportionately affect the economically marginalized.

By critically analyzing the structural and systemic factors that limit legal access for the poor, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how poverty intersects with legal exclusion. It goes beyond theoretical discussions and legal frameworks to explore real-world challenges faced by vulnerable populations, particularly those in rural, marginalized, and underrepresented communities.

The findings of this research can inform policymakers, legal aid institutions, non-governmental organizations, and social justice advocates about the gaps in the current legal support mechanisms. Furthermore, it aims to provide evidence-based recommendations that can lead to more inclusive and effective legal aid systems, promote pro bono services, and encourage reforms in legal education and public legal awareness.

Ultimately, this study aspires to serve as a catalyst for change, contributing to the global movement toward achieving equal access to justice for all, and ensuring that legal representation is not a privilege limited to the affluent, but a fundamental right for every individual—regardless of their economic condition.

Hypothesis of the Study

H₁: There is a significant relationship between an individual's economic status and their

ability to access legal representation in civil and criminal cases.

H₂: Existing legal aid schemes are insufficient in addressing the legal needs of the poor due to limited funding, outreach, and quality of services.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its geographical scope, potentially affecting the generalizability of its findings to other regions with different legal systems and economic conditions. Data availability may also pose a challenge, as economically disadvantaged individuals may be less likely to participate in surveys or interviews. The subjective nature of personal accounts could lead to biases or incomplete information. Additionally, the study's analysis of legal aid schemes may not fully capture the complexity of all existing systems due to time constraints. Technological access and literacy issues may exclude certain populations from modern legal aid solutions, further limiting the study's reach. Finally, the study may not account for all forms of intersectionality, such as race or gender, which could impact access to legal representation. These limitations highlight areas for further research to deepen our understanding of access to justice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A) Doctrinal part

The Impact of Legal Costs on Low-Income Individuals' Access to Justice

Legal representation plays a critical role in ensuring fair trials and the protection of individual rights. However, for low-income individuals, the cost of legal services often becomes a major barrier, preventing them from accessing justice. The high fees charged by private attorneys, along with the additional costs associated with filing cases, court fees, and administrative expenses, disproportionately affect marginalized populations who already struggle with financial insecurity.

For individuals living below the poverty line, the cost of hiring a competent lawyer can be prohibitively expensive. This is especially true in countries where the legal system heavily relies on private legal representation and the availability of public defenders is limited or underfunded. The disparity between the cost of legal services and the financial resources available to low-income families often leads to situations where individuals must either represent themselves in court or forego legal action altogether.

This phenomenon is particularly problematic in criminal cases, where the consequences of not having adequate legal representation can be severe, including wrongful convictions or harsher

sentences. Without a qualified lawyer, defendants are at a significant disadvantage, as they may lack the knowledge of legal procedures, rights, and defenses. Moreover, self-representation can often lead to procedural errors, delaying justice and increasing the likelihood of unfavorable outcomes.

In civil cases, such as housing disputes, family law matters, or employment issues, the inability to afford legal services similarly deprives individuals of their right to a fair hearing. For example, tenants facing eviction may not be able to hire a lawyer to challenge unfair or illegal evictions, leading to homelessness or displacement. Similarly, workers who experience wage theft or discrimination may find it impossible to pursue claims against employers without legal representation, effectively allowing employers to violate workers' rights with impunity.

The financial burden is exacerbated by indirect costs associated with legal proceedings. Low-income individuals may struggle with transportation to and from the court, taking time off from work to attend hearings, and the cost of necessary documentation or evidence gathering. These barriers can create additional pressures, further discouraging individuals from pursuing legal recourse.

While legal aid programs exist in many jurisdictions to address these issues, they often fail to meet the growing demand. Publicly funded legal services are frequently under-resourced, leading to long wait times, limited scope of services, and insufficient legal advice. In some areas, the availability of legal aid is so scarce that many low-income individuals are left to navigate the justice system without any assistance at all.

The impact of legal costs on access to justice is not only a legal issue but also a broader social concern. When access to the legal system is restricted by financial barriers, it undermines the principle of equality before the law, creating a justice system that privileges the wealthy and leaves the poor at a disadvantage. This inequality fosters distrust in legal institutions and erodes public confidence in the fairness of the judicial system.

Furthermore, the financial barrier to legal representation disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including women, racial minorities, people with disabilities, and rural populations. These groups already face multiple forms of discrimination and often experience even greater economic challenges, making it even harder for them to afford legal services.

In conclusion, the impact of legal costs on low-income individuals is far-reaching, affecting their ability to access justice, their rights, and their overall well-being. To address this issue, reforms are necessary to make legal representation more affordable and accessible. Expanding legal aid programs, promoting pro bono legal services, and exploring alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are some potential solutions to ensure that justice is not reserved for

those who can afford it but is accessible to all, regardless of their economic status.

Effectiveness of Legal Aid Systems in Bridging the Justice Gap

Legal aid systems play a crucial role in ensuring that individuals who cannot afford private legal representation still have access to justice. These systems are designed to provide free or low-cost legal services to low-income individuals, helping to bridge the justice gap and promote equality before the law. The effectiveness of legal aid programs, however, is a matter of ongoing concern and debate, as many low-income individuals continue to face significant barriers in accessing legal representation despite the existence of these services.

One of the primary goals of legal aid systems is to ensure that poverty does not prevent individuals from defending their rights in the legal system. Ideally, legal aid would provide comprehensive support in both civil and criminal cases, ensuring that the poor are not disadvantaged by their inability to afford legal counsel. However, the reality is that many legal aid programs are overburdened, underfunded, and often unable to meet the growing demand for services. As a result, many eligible individuals are left without the assistance they need, and those who do qualify for legal aid often experience long wait times and substandard legal representation.

The quality of legal services provided by legal aid organizations is another area of concern. While legal aid practitioners are often highly dedicated, they may be stretched thin due to high caseloads, limited resources, and insufficient funding. This can result in less personalized, lower-quality legal assistance, which undermines the effectiveness of the system. In some cases, legal aid services may only be available for certain types of cases, leaving other legal needs unaddressed. For example, some jurisdictions limit legal aid to criminal cases, while civil cases—such as family law, housing, or employment disputes—may not be covered, leaving the poor without support in these crucial areas.

Additionally, legal aid systems often struggle with resource constraints that limit their capacity to deliver timely and adequate support. Many legal aid providers face chronic underfunding, which results in staff shortages, inadequate training, and insufficient outreach efforts. This lack of resources not only affects the quality of legal services but also impacts the ability of legal aid programs to raise awareness of their services within low-income communities. As a result, many individuals who would qualify for legal aid are unaware of their rights or how to access the assistance they need.

Another challenge in the effectiveness of legal aid systems is the variability in access and coverage. In many countries, legal aid is provided at the national level, but the distribution of

resources and services can be uneven, particularly in rural or remote areas. Rural communities may have limited access to legal aid lawyers, forcing individuals to travel long distances or face delays in receiving assistance. Moreover, some legal aid programs are only available in major urban centers, further exacerbating the access gap for rural populations.

Despite these challenges, legal aid systems have made significant strides in addressing the justice gap, particularly in criminal defense. In countries with robust public defender systems, such as the United States and Canada, the provision of defense attorneys for indigent defendants has been instrumental in ensuring fair trials and protecting the constitutional right to counsel. Legal aid has also been crucial in facilitating access to justice in civil matters, helping low-income individuals navigate issues such as housing, child custody, and domestic violence.

In some jurisdictions, legal aid systems have adopted innovative approaches to improve access to justice, such as online legal advice platforms, simplified application processes, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations. These efforts aim to make legal services more accessible and reduce the administrative burden on clients. For example, some legal aid organizations have begun using technology to streamline case intake and provide basic legal advice online, helping to reach individuals who may not have the means or ability to visit a legal aid office in person.

Moreover, legal aid is increasingly seen as a tool for promoting social justice and addressing systemic inequality. In many countries, legal aid has been linked to broader social policies aimed at reducing inequality and promoting human rights. By providing low-income individuals with the tools they need to assert their rights, legal aid systems contribute to a more equitable society where access to justice is not determined by wealth.

In conclusion, while legal aid systems have proven to be an essential tool in bridging the justice gap for the poor, their effectiveness is hampered by issues such as underfunding, high demand, resource limitations, and uneven access. To enhance the effectiveness of legal aid, further investment in funding, the expansion of services to cover a broader range of legal issues, and the development of innovative solutions to increase accessibility are needed. Addressing these challenges will ensure that legal aid systems can truly fulfill their mandate of providing equal access to justice for all.

The Role of Alternative Legal Solutions: Pro Bono Services and Technology in Expanding Access to Justice

As traditional legal aid systems face increasing pressures due to limited resources and growing

demand, alternative legal solutions, including pro bono services and technology, have become pivotal in expanding access to justice, particularly for low-income individuals. These alternative solutions offer promising avenues for individuals who cannot afford the high costs of legal representation, yet still need legal support to protect their rights.

Pro bono services, where lawyers volunteer their time and expertise for free or at a significantly reduced cost, have been essential in addressing the justice gap. These services are typically provided by law firms, nonprofit organizations, and individual practitioners who are committed to serving communities in need. Pro bono work can cover a wide range of legal issues, from family law and housing disputes to immigration and employment cases, helping vulnerable populations navigate legal systems that would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

In many countries, law firms and bar associations are encouraged to dedicate a certain percentage of their lawyers' time to pro bono work, and some jurisdictions even mandate pro bono contributions as part of a lawyer's professional responsibilities. Pro bono services are especially beneficial in civil cases, where legal aid resources may be insufficient or unavailable. The increasing trend of corporate social responsibility has also seen major firms allocating significant resources to support public interest causes, providing pro bono representation on a large scale.

While pro bono services have made significant strides in bridging the justice gap, challenges remain. The supply of pro bono lawyers is often not enough to meet the demand, especially in areas with high poverty rates or in niche areas of law that require specialized knowledge. Additionally, while lawyers provide their services for free, clients often still face other indirect costs associated with legal proceedings, such as court fees, travel expenses, and document preparation costs, which can still be a financial burden.

In response to these challenges, technology has emerged as a transformative force in expanding access to justice. Legal technology, or "legal tech," refers to digital platforms and tools that simplify the legal process, reduce costs, and make legal resources more accessible. Online platforms that offer self-help legal tools, document automation, and online dispute resolution (ODR) are gaining popularity, enabling individuals to navigate legal matters without the need for expensive legal counsel.

For instance, AI-driven tools can provide individuals with basic legal advice, guide them through the process of drafting documents, and help them understand their rights. These tools are particularly valuable in straightforward legal matters, such as drafting a will, filling out legal forms, or understanding tenant rights. Legal tech companies, such as Rocket Lawyer and LegalZoom, have made strides in providing affordable legal services by automating routine

legal tasks, which reduces the need for extensive human involvement and significantly lowers costs for clients.

Moreover, online legal services and virtual consultations have made it easier for individuals in remote areas to access legal advice and assistance. Traditionally, individuals in rural or underserved communities may have had to travel long distances to access legal aid or lawyers, which posed an additional barrier. Virtual legal consultations remove this geographic limitation, allowing clients to connect with lawyers from the comfort of their homes.

One of the most promising aspects of legal technology is its potential to democratize access to justice. By leveraging machine learning and artificial intelligence, technology can help address the overwhelming demand for legal services by automating repetitive tasks, offering legal advice at scale, and providing data-driven insights into legal trends. These tools also have the potential to be scaled more efficiently, allowing them to serve a larger number of people, particularly those who live in areas where legal professionals are scarce.

Furthermore, technology can help reduce the information asymmetry in the legal system. Many individuals, especially in low-income communities, lack knowledge about their legal rights and how to assert them. Online platforms and mobile applications that provide legal education, simplified information, and access to forms and templates empower individuals to handle basic legal issues on their own, which can relieve some pressure from overburdened legal aid systems.

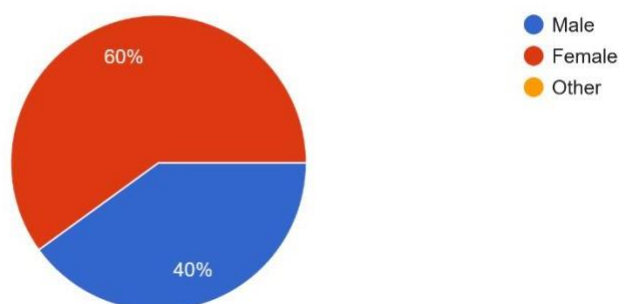
Despite these advancements, there are limitations to the role of technology in expanding access to justice. Not all individuals have access to the internet or the digital literacy required to use these tools effectively. For some low-income populations, lack of access to smartphones or computers can limit their ability to benefit from these innovations. Additionally, while technology can assist with basic legal tasks, complex legal issues often still require the expertise and judgment of a qualified attorney.

In conclusion, pro bono services and technology have proven to be powerful tools in expanding access to justice for low-income individuals. Pro bono legal work helps bridge the gap in legal representation, while legal tech provides affordable, scalable solutions that reduce costs and increase accessibility. Together, these alternative legal solutions hold great potential in transforming the legal landscape, ensuring that more individuals, regardless of their economic status, can access the justice system and protect their rights. However, for these solutions to be truly effective, ongoing efforts must be made to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their technological access or ability, can benefit from these innovations.

B) Non doctrinal part of the study

What is your Gender?

25 responses



Source: Primary Data

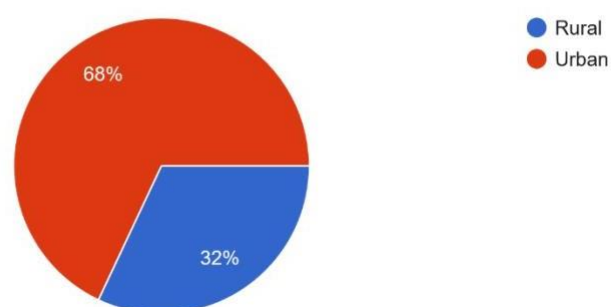
Table no. 1 Gender of the Respondents.

Male	Female	Total
15 (60.00)	10 (40.00)	25 (100)

Interpretation: The data shows that out of a total of 25 individuals, 15 are male (60 percentage) and 10 are female (40 percentage). This indicates a higher representation of males compared to females in the given group. The overall distribution is fairly imbalanced, with males making up a majority of the total. The percentages in parentheses represent the proportion of each gender within the total group.

Which type of area do you stay in?

25 responses



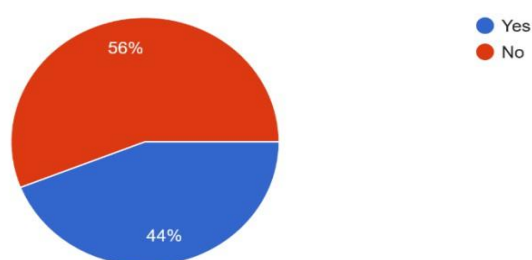
Source: primary data

Table No. 3.

Indicators	Urban	Rural	Total
Male	3(12.00)	10(40.00)	13(52.00)
Female	5 (20.00)	7 (28.00)	12 (48.00)
Total	8 (32.00)	17 (68.00)	25 (100)

Interpretation: The data shows that out of a total of 25 individuals, 8 are from urban areas (32 percentage) and 17 are from rural areas (68 percentage). This indicates a higher representation of individuals from rural areas compared to urban areas. The percentages in parentheses reflect the proportion of each group within the total population. The distribution is skewed toward rural areas.

Do you believe that low-income individuals receive fair treatment in the legal system compared to those who can afford private legal representation?
25 responses



Source: Primary Data

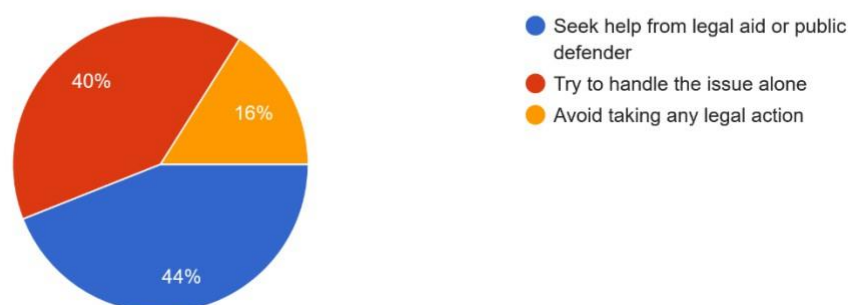
Table No. 3 Fair Treatment of the People.

Indicators	Yes	No	Total
Male	4 (16.00)	6 (24.00)	11 (44.00)
Female	7 (28.00)	8 (32.00)	14 (56.00)
Total	11 (44.00)	14 (56.00)	25 (100)

Interpretation: The data shows that out of a total of 25 individuals, 11 answered "Yes" (44 percentage) and 14 answered "No" (56 percentage). This indicates that a majority of individuals (56 percentage) responded negatively, while 44 percentage provided a positive response. The percentages in parentheses represent the proportion of each answer within the total group. The distribution is slightly skewed toward "No."

If you or someone close to you needed legal help but couldn't afford a lawyer, what would you likely do?

25 responses



Source: Primary Data

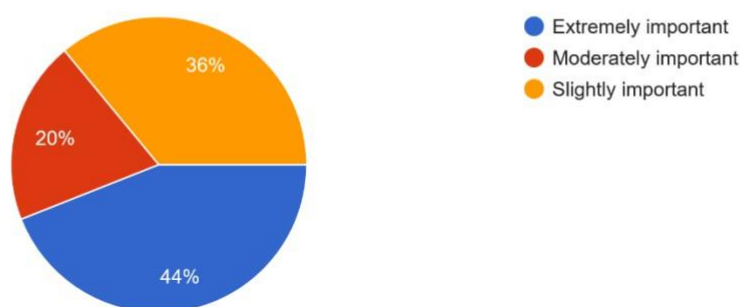
Table No. 4 Necessity of Legal Help.

Indicators	Seek help	Handle alone	Avoid	Total
Male	4 (16.00)	5 (20.00)	1 (4.00)	10 (40.00)
Female	7 (28.00)	5 (20.00)	3 (12.00)	15 (15.00)
Total	11 (44.00)	10 (40.00)	4 (16.00)	25 (100)

Interpretation: Table 4 shows that out of 25 individuals, 11 (44 percentage) seek legal help, 10 (40 percentage) prefer to handle legal matters on their own, and 4 (16 percentage) avoid seeking legal assistance altogether. This indicates a majority either seeks legal support or manages issues independently, with fewer avoiding legal help.

How important do you think it is for the government to increase funding for free or low-cost legal services?

25 responses



Source: Primary Data

Table No. 5 Importance of Governments Fund.

Indicators	Extremely	Moderately	slightly	Total
Male	5 (20.00)	3 (3.00)	7 (21.00)	15 (60.00)
Female	6 (24.00)	2 (2.00)	3 (9.00)	10 (40.00)
Total	11 (44.00)	5 (5.00)	10 (30.00)	25 (100)

Interpretation: The data shows that out of 25 individuals, 11 (44 percentage) are extremely affected, 5 (20 percentage) are moderately affected, and 9 (36 percentage) are slightly affected. This indicates that the largest group feels extremely affected, followed by those slightly affected, while a smaller portion feels only moderate impact. The percentages reflect the varying degrees of effect experienced by the respondents.

Testing of hypothesis

H₁: As the analysis clearly indicates a significant relationship between an individual's economic status and their ability to access legal representation. Individuals from lower economic backgrounds are less likely to seek legal help, more inclined to handle legal matters

alone, or avoid them entirely due to financial constraints.

H₂: As the data and literature review suggest that existing legal aid schemes are insufficient. Limitations such as inadequate funding, lack of awareness, and limited outreach result in a large portion of the poor population being underserved or excluded from effective legal assistance.

CONCLUSION

Access to justice is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of any fair and democratic society. However, this study clearly demonstrates that economic barriers remain one of the most significant obstacles preventing poor and marginalized individuals from securing legal representation. The inability to afford legal services often leads to self-representation, legal inaction, or unjust outcomes, thereby deepening existing inequalities within the justice system. The findings confirm that an individual's economic status has a direct impact on their ability to access legal help, and that existing legal aid schemes, while essential, are often insufficient in terms of funding, outreach, and quality. Many individuals are either unaware of their legal rights or unable to navigate the legal system without support. While efforts such as pro bono services and legal technology have shown potential in bridging the justice gap, they are not yet universally accessible, especially for those lacking digital literacy or resources.

Therefore, a multi-pronged approach is needed—one that includes strengthening legal aid services, increasing public legal awareness, expanding pro bono networks, and investing in accessible legal technology. Without such reforms, the principle of "equal justice under law" remains aspirational rather than actual. This study highlights the urgent need for systemic change to ensure that justice is not a privilege of the wealthy but a guaranteed right for all, regardless of economic status.

SUGGESTIONS

To address the persistent economic barriers to legal representation, there is an urgent need to strengthen and expand the reach of legal aid services. Governments should allocate more funding to public legal aid institutions and ensure their presence in rural and underserved areas. Simplifying legal procedures and improving legal literacy through awareness programs can empower low-income individuals to better understand and assert their rights. Additionally, promoting and institutionalizing pro bono services through law firms and bar associations can help bridge the gap for those who cannot afford legal representation. Mobile legal aid clinics and community-based legal camps can also serve as practical solutions for reaching remote

populations.

Furthermore, integrating technology into legal service delivery can play a transformative role. Online legal platforms, mobile apps, and AI-powered tools can provide affordable or free legal guidance, particularly for routine legal matters. However, such solutions must be made accessible to people with limited digital literacy. Collaborations with NGOs, universities, and civil society organizations can enhance outreach and resource mobilization. Special attention should be given to vulnerable groups—such as women, the elderly, minorities, and the disabled—who face layered challenges in accessing justice. Policy reforms focused on inclusivity, accountability, and transparency are essential to ensure that access to justice becomes a reality for all, not just a privilege for the few

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12. McQuoid-Mason, D. (2020). *Using a holistic approach to legal aid to ensure access to justice in developing countries: A perspective from South Africa*
13. To explore the role of socio-demographic factors (such as gender, caste, ethnicity, and disability) in compounding the challenges of accessing justice for the poor.
14. To suggest practical policy recommendations and reforms aimed at enhancing access to affordable, timely, and quality legal representation for economically disadvantaged populations.