



MARCH, 2026



DOCUMENTING VOICES OF WOMEN LEGAL PROFESSIONALS IN INDIA

Findings from a National Survey conducted by the

SUPREME COURT BAR ASSOCIATION



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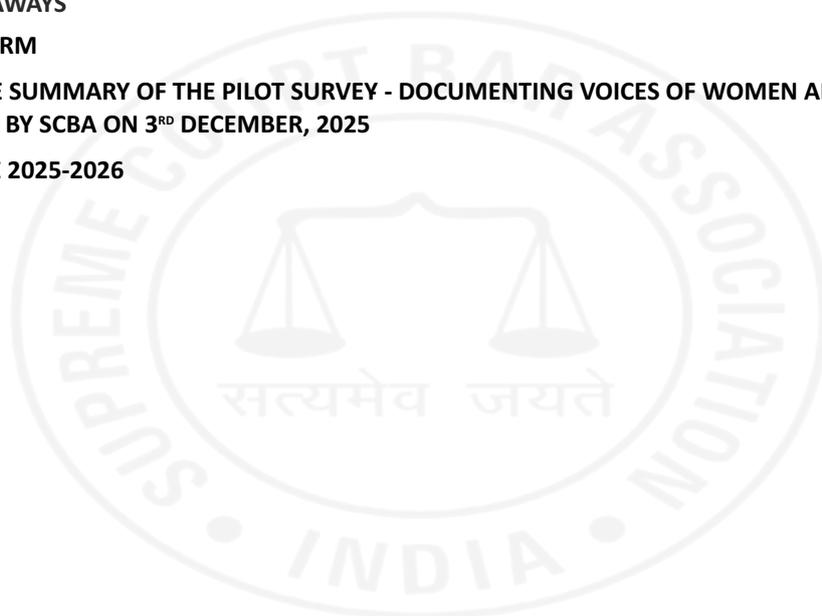
Demographics | Infrastructure | Bias | Challenges | Work-life balance | Leadership |
Reforms

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Message from the President

The pages of this survey are not just data points.

For too long, the legal profession has operated mechanically. We have expected women to walk these corridors, argue these briefs, and command these courtrooms while carrying a weight that is both personal and professional. We speak of equality but we often fail to acknowledge the reality that a woman advocate navigates before she even steps through the gallery doors.

There is a fundamental truth we must be brave enough to say: men and women can never be equal because women will always be greater. In the law, we value endurance. The endurance that men display is predominantly linear, focused solely on the brief at hand. A woman's endurance is never singular. You cannot compartmentalize her professional commitments from the multidimensional realities she is expected to shoulder. She constantly manages the unspoken: the biological cycles the law ignores, the domestic anchors society assumes she will carry, and most importantly, the emotional intelligence required to navigate a space that often mistakes her grace for weakness. In the truest sense, a female advocate is resolute, self-made and indefatigable.

Alongside all of this, she treats financial independence as a responsibility central to her dignity and professional identity, even though it is rarely acknowledged or accorded the respect it deserves.

To do what we do, while also being the vessel of life and the heartbeat of the home, is not equality. It is a quiet, daily superiority of spirit.

All that being said, the bar for professional excellence should not be unequal. Work must be regarded for the work put in, unquestionably. Whether it is the hours in the field, the client discussions, or the long working days, even when the woman advocate does it all, the opportunities at her disposal remain unfair and nowhere close to being at par. A welcome corrective is the rise of competitive examinations, where women surpass and emerge with flying colours.

Here, I have a few questions to raise. Why must the bar be so impractically high? Why is brilliance the minimum threshold for recognition, and that too only when amplified by the digital age? I have already shared how the significantly low representation of women, like in the higher judiciary, is the result of non-verbal cues being translated into discretionary outcomes.

This survey was not conducted to “allow” women to speak. It was conducted because the Bar can no longer afford to be deaf. The “unheard” and the “unexpressed” are the very things that make a practitioner human. When a woman advocate is forced to suppress her reality to “fit in” to a male centric professional mould, the law loses its soul.

This survey is a testament to the grit of our sisters at the Bar. We see the challenges that go unsaid. It is a message to us men, to be more empathetic.

As President, I do not wish to glorify the extraordinary. I wish for a day where excellence at work is the only distinguishing parameter for professionals, men and women alike. The future of the Bar lies in building a culture that finally matches the depth and strength women already bring to it.

Let us stop asking women to adapt. It is time for the institution to evolve.

Mr. Vikas Singh

Senior Advocate & President, SCBA

Message from the Vice-President

I wish to extend my heartiest congratulations to the members of the Executive Committee and especially the women Colleagues for the tremendous work done by them in conducting this survey. I am very hopeful that these findings will serve as a catalyst for real change, particularly in enhancing women participation across the institutions of our Justice Delivery System. For a legal system to be truly robust, the active representation of women at every level is essential. I believe this work will pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future, reflecting the core values of Justice we all stand for.

Mr. Rahul Kaushik

Senior Advocate & Vice-President, SCBA



Message from Hony. Secretary

"I opened a closed door."

— Justice M. Fathima Beevi

Despite decades of progress, gender disparity continues to persist in the legal profession. While India has over 20 lakh advocates, only about 3 lakh are women—a reflection of enduring structural and societal barriers. These challenges are not rooted in a lack of merit, but in systemic inequalities, unconscious biases, and workplace cultures that often hinder women's advancement.

In September 2025, the Ladies' Welfare Sub-Committee of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) initiated a simple yet profound question—"Is gender justice still far-fetched?" What began as a regional dialogue soon evolved into a nationwide movement, culminating in a National Survey designed to capture the lived realities of women in the legal profession.

Despite periodic emails to office bearers of various Bar Associations, Bar Councils across the country, Registrar Generals of different High Courts, women members of the SCBA, and universities for online interactions, the movement faced several impediments. Thereafter, more focused and impactful approaches were adopted.

The initiative gained momentum with the support of the Ladies' Wing of Akhil Bhartiya Adhivakta Parishad, which helped accelerate responses at the national level. The role of the media—NDTV, Bar & Bench, and LiveLaw—was also significant in amplifying the effort.

This initiative, supported by institutions, bar bodies, and the legal community across the country, represents more than a data-collection exercise—it is a step towards acknowledgement, introspection, and reform.

The findings of this survey reaffirm a fundamental truth: there is no dearth of capable women lawyers in India. What is needed is an enabling ecosystem that allows them to thrive.

It is hoped that this initiative will serve as a foundation for continued dialogue and meaningful change, with SCBA committed to carrying this exercise forward periodically in the years to come.

Ms. Pragya Baghel
Hony. Secretary, SCBA

Message From Chairperson Ladies Welfare Including Ladies Bar Room Sub- Committee

“Experiment without historical precedent”

The fabrication of present seminal work dates back to July 2025, when during a function Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant, the present Chief Justice of India, shared a thought-provoking suggestion that inspired to initiate a pilot project survey for lady advocates of Delhi-NCR to collect their feedback about the problems being faced in the profession and suggestions thereon.

The underlying aim was of initiating a discourse wherein gender-specific issues are identified and resolved through multi-sectoral efforts, ensuring no single perspective remain unattended and unanswered. This vision encompasses a fully developed society in terms of what Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam famously said – “Empowering women leads ultimately to the development of a good nation”. This vision is a call for opportunities that are open to the lady advocates of even the Bar Associations of every Taluka/Tehsil across the country and growth that is both sustainable and inclusive.

The earlier successful conduct of panel discussion on – “WE: Women Empowerment in Law : On Strength, Struggle and Success” held on 3rd December 2025 by SCBA at New Delhi, on the pilot survey having 19 questions on Documenting Voices of Women Advocates of Delhi-NCR motivated the Executive Committee of the SCBA to take the survey pertaining to the problems of Lady Advocates to the next level in the form of a National Survey.

This survey, titled National Survey – Documenting the journeys, Challenges and Achievements of Woman Advocates practising in various Courts throughout the country, is an independent analytical exercise that integrates the findings into a comprehensive national assessment of the difficulties being faced by the lady lawyers and is the mouthpiece of the suggestions they have found a stage to be vocal on.

The roadmap can be conceived not as a static blueprint but as a living document to be updated periodically every 5 years, so as to renew as and when the infrastructure improves for the Bar and Bench in the Courts, technology advances and global dynamics evolve.

In view of the volatile pace of the responses to the National Survey, a roadmap was devised to reach out to maximum number of Lady Advocates in their respective courts during working days, thereby visited High Courts - Punjab and Haryana High Court at Chandigarh, High Court of Delhi apart from various District Courts in Haryana namely at Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonapat, Ganaur, Panipat, Karnal, Kurukshetra, Ambala; those visited repeatedly at Delhi were Rouse Avenue, Karkardooma, Saket, Dwarka, Tis Hazari, Rohini, CAT, NCDRC, NCLT, and Ghaziabad, Surajpur, Mathura, Hapur, Fategarh - Farrukhabad District Courts in Uttar Pradesh –apart from conducting Virtual Meet-ups with the lady office bearers of the National Team of Akhil Bhartiya Adhivakta Parishad, and PG Students of Law Universities including Jamia Milia Islamia, Jamia Hamdard, UPES Dehradun, Sidharth University, Manipal university, NLIU Bhopal & Jindal Global University to explain the benefit of filling and submitting responses to the National Survey.

I express my gratitude to all those Lady advocates and their male counterparts, Academicians, colleagues, associates, law interns, who, from the various parts of the country, cooperated with Team SCBA, during the collection of survey data. Also, special acknowledgment to Shri Ashish Bhargava, NDTV Journalist for his significant coverage of this survey.

Ladies, please note, that you have never arrived enough to explore new opportunities, so, Give Wings to your dreams & let your dreams Fly.

Dr Monika Gusain

Senior Advocate

Senior Executive Member, Executive Committee &
Chairperson of Ladies Welfare Including Ladies Bar Room Sub- Committee, SCBA

Message from the Authors of the Report

The entire exercise of analysing the data and authoring this report has been audacious and truly humbling at the same time.

It has been humbling because as lawyers, we came to this task with the tools of our trade: questions, structure, analysis. But what came back to us, across 2,604 responses and 54 questions, was something that no legal brief had quite prepared us for: the sheer weight of a shared experience. Women legal professionals from every corner of India, from the district courts of the North-East to the High Courts of the South, and the mighty corridors of the Supreme Court from first-generation practitioners finding their footing to senior advocates with decades at the Bar, spoke with a candour and a clarity that kept us aligned to the spirit of the task at hand. All due precautions have been taken in the analysis of the data; however, any errors that may remain are inadvertent.

It has been audacious because the survey was born out of a recognition that the voices of women legal professionals in India, though numerous and vital, remain largely undocumented at a national level. What was needed was not anecdote but evidence; not impression but data. It is with this conviction that the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) undertook this task, one that could not have been attempted without the seed being sown by Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, the Chief Justice of India and encouragement of all Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India, and the active enablement of the President of the Supreme Court Bar Association and its entire Executive Committee. The audacity of the endeavour lay in its trajectory. The exercise began with documenting the experiences of women legal professionals within the Delhi NCR region. When the expansion of the survey to the national level was suggested, the Ladies Welfare, including Ladies Bar Room Sub-Committee, along with the entire Executive Committee of the SCBA, extended their wholehearted support. It was with this commitment that the task assumed its present scale and was carried forward as a truly national exercise.

Once it was resolved to undertake the exercise at a national level, a rigorous survey comprising 54 questions was designed, structured across seven thematic sections.

It endeavoured to touch upon the lived experiences of women legal professionals in their full complexity, from the practical constraints of office infrastructure and access to resources, to the subtler but no less real burdens of bias, harassment, and the near-impossible balancing act of family and professional life. It asked about leadership and ambition, about satisfaction and burnout, about what the profession has given these women and what it has, too often, withheld.

This work is offered not as a final word, but as a beginning - a baseline of evidence from which policies can be shaped, institutions can act, and aspirations realised. The profession has heard enough of the challenges in the abstract. These 2,604 voices put numbers to it. Hence, we are extremely grateful to everyone who gave their time and energy to ensure this survey reached as many voices as possible. We are equally grateful to each one of the women legal professionals for lending their voice to the start of a meaningful discourse.

Because when data speaks, change follows — one step at a time.

Dr. Anindita Pujari,
Senior Executive Member, SCBA
Chairperson, Sub-committees on
Professional development & training of junior lawyers and
Professional Excellence and model bar

Mr. Shaileshwar Yadav,
Member, SCBA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview and Purpose

Women's formal entry into the Indian legal profession is often traced to Cornelia Sorabji, the first woman to study law at Oxford and practise in British India. This trajectory was also marked by exclusion, as Regina Guha's unsuccessful attempt to enrol highlighted the barriers women faced. These efforts, along with pioneers such as Sudhanshu Bala Hazra, led to the enactment of the Women's Legal Practitioners Act, 1923, which formally enabled women's entry into the profession. Progress, however, remained slow. Women had a negligible presence at the Bar, and milestones such as Justice Anna Chandy's appointment to the Kerala High Court in 1959 and Justice M. Fathima Beevi's elevation to the Supreme Court in 1989 remained exceptions in a profession that continued to be predominantly male in its composition, culture, and leadership well into the twentieth century.

India today has one of the largest bars in the world with more than 2 million registered advocates, with an increasing participation of women lawyers. However, this numerical growth has not translated into structural progress. Gender bias, inadequate mentorship, early career financial precarity, poor infrastructure, and disproportionate domestic responsibilities continue to shape the professional trajectories of women practitioners. This journey remains largely undocumented at the national front.

To address this gap, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) launched Documenting Voices of Women Legal Professionals in India. Building on a pilot study conducted in Delhi NCR, this national report analyses responses from 2,604 women legal professionals across seven themes: demographic profiles, infrastructure and technology access, experiences of bias, challenges and well-being, marriage and family, leadership, and reform priorities.

Select Pointers

Q#	Topic	Key Insight & Statistic
A — DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (Q1–15)		
Q1	State Bar Council	23 State Bar Councils represented.
Q2	Years of Practice	Early-career (0–5 yrs) largest cohort at 37.4%; seniors (15+ yrs) second at 30.7%.
Q3	Primary Forum	District Courts 52.9% · High Courts 28.8% · Supreme Court 13.0% · Tribunals 2.5%.
Q4	Relocation	45% relocated; of those, 50% due to family/marriage - career consistently subordinated to domestic circumstances.
Q5	Practice Set-Up	58.2% are sole practitioners (limited infrastructure/mentorship); only 2.8% in medium/large firms.
Q6	Professional Position	87.6% Advocates; Senior Advocates at SC level just 0.4% — stark under-representation at top designations.

¹ LiveLaw, Odisha Lawyers' Day: Madhusudhan Das, 'Madhu Babu' & Women's Entry into the Legal Profession, available at: <https://www.livelaw.in/columns/odisha-lawyers-day-madhushudhan-das-madhu-babu-womens-entry-into-the-legal-profession-197799>.

Q#	Topic	Key Insight & Statistic
Q7	Senior Designation	53.9% say designation is easier for men; only 1.7% say easier for women — structural bias clearly perceived.
Q8	Govt/Institutional Positions	64.5% have never held any designated govt role; zero served as AG/SG/ASG at SC level.
Q9	Work Frequency in Panel Roles	Only 53.7% of panel holders received work regularly; 14.3% rarely, 8% almost never.
Q10	Reservation — Legal Services Panels	59.4% favour mandatory minimum women's representation in NALSA/SLSA/DLSA panels; only 12.3% oppose.
Q11	Mandatory Govt Panel Policy	67.28% support a mandatory policy for women representation as panel counsel/law officers — highest majority across all policy questions.
Q12	Govt Panels & Gender	55.5% say govt panel appointments are easier for men; only 12.7% see no gender differential.
Q13	Area of Practice	Civil law 71.3%, Family 65.4%, Criminal 64.5% — women's significant presence in criminal law challenges the male-dominance perception.
Q14	Specialisation & Opportunity	56.9% say their specialisation has at some point limited professional access due to gender stereotyping.
Q15	First-Generation Lawyers	83.1% are first-generation lawyers — inherited networks are absent, compounding gender-based exclusions.
B — OFFICE, INFRASTRUCTURE & TECHNOLOGY (Q16–22)		
Q16	Office Location	Only 19% within walkable distance of court; 12% have no dedicated office at all.
Q17	Impact of Proximity	83.8% say having an office near court helps practice significantly or to some extent.
Q18	Barriers to Court-Proximate Office	High rent 45.4% · Financially unviable 37.5% · Early-stage 24.2% · Family responsibility 20.3% · Safety 8.2%.
Q19	Access to Professional Resources	75% lack paid legal databases; 77% lack clerical staff; 56% lack stable internet/devices; 21% have no resources at all.
Q20	Gender Bias — Encountered	34.4% personally experienced/witnessed institutional gender bias; only 29.4% reported none — ~6 in 10 acknowledged bias.
Q21	Contexts of Gender Bias	Fee/payment negotiations 42.7% · Gender-imposed work-life expectations 39.5% · Client trust/briefing 32.8% · Panel appointments 29.1%.
Q22	Technology & E-Courts	65.3% report positive overall impact; only 2.1% found it mostly negative — technology is a relative equaliser.

C — EXPERIENCE, COMPARISON & BIAS (Q23–28)

Q23	Overall Experience	63.7% found the profession discouraging at some point; only 19.2% describe it as very encouraging.
Q24	Vs. Male Counterparts	81.3% say their journey is harder than male peers' (41.1% much harder, 40.2% slightly harder) — consistent across all seniority levels.
Q25	Sexual Harassment	16.1% disclosed harassment; 12.7% preferred not to say — actual incidence likely up to 28.8%; 38.6% did not report.
Q26	Backlash After Reporting	57% of those who reported faced backlash — from peers/seniors/judiciary (26.6%), work exclusion (13.5%), subtle retaliation (9.1%).
Q27	Women Discouraging Women	~45% encountered 'horizontal hostility' — women acting as gatekeepers against other women, driven by structural scarcity.
Q28	Networking Barriers	72.3% say gender hinders professional networking — directly impacting referrals, panel appointments, briefings, and senior designation.

D — CHALLENGES, MENTORSHIP & WELL-BEING (Q29–34)

Q29	Major Challenges	Limited work opportunities 60% · Networking difficulties 42.8% · Pay inequality 40.2% · Work-life imbalance 37.5%.
Q30	Mentorship	~37.7% face unmet mentorship demand (seeking + unsatisfied combined); 83.1% first-gen lawyers especially disadvantaged.
Q31	Grievance Redressal Confidence	59.2% (6 in 10) lack or only conditionally hold confidence that complaints will be handled fairly.
Q32	Burnout & Stress	84% experienced burnout/stress at least sometimes in 12 months; 94.4% among early-career (0–5 yrs) — signalling likely attrition.
Q33	Judicial Exam Reforms	Uniform/transparent syllabus demanded by 59.7%; support measures for women candidates (maternity relaxation etc.) by 50.1%.
Q34	Reservation for Women Judges	80.5% support minimum reservation for women judges in High Courts and Supreme Court.

E — MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD, CARE & FAMILY (Q35–45)

Q35	Family Status	Married with children 44.1% · Single 36.4% · Married, no children 10% · Divorced/Separated 3.3% · Single mothers 2.5%.
Q36	Marital Status & Work	71.5% reported professional impact from marital status — 44.7% minor hardships, 26.8% major hardships.
Q37	Types of Hardships	Work-life balance (30.1%) and financial instability (29.6%) top the list; household pressure, physical exhaustion, and caregiving duties follow.
Q38	Childcare Accommodation	42.7% of those who sought caregiving accommodation were denied — more than 4 in 10 received no support.

Q#	Topic	Key Insight & Statistic
Q39	Deferral on Childbirth	55.2% of applicable respondents faced difficulties getting matters deferred on childbirth — institutional resistance to a basic accommodation.
Q40	Family & Professional Growth	30.3% say family responsibilities limit their professional opportunities; only 18.9% say having children positively supported their career .
Q41/42	Career Advice — Gender	72.1% say career advice would not differ between a daughter and son; 27.9% say it would — reflecting perceived gender-based risk.
Q43	Career for Daughters	Judiciary tops at 47.5% — perceived as offering greater stability, respect, and protection versus the informal hierarchies of the Bar.
Q44	Returnship Programmes	89.8% support formal returnship programmes in some form; only 2% consider existing systems sufficient.
Q45	Statutory Rights Implementation	~1 in 10 women lawyers could not implement their own statutory rights — striking for a legally trained cohort.
F — LEADERSHIP & INSTITUTIONS (Q46–52)		
Q46	Equal Opportunity in Bar Leadership	64.7% believe women do not have equal access to Bar leadership; SC has since mandated 30% women's representation.
Q47	Barriers to Leadership	Lack of women's networks 65.5% · Financial/time constraints 52.6% · Family expectations 48.4% · Hostile election culture 38.1%.
Q48	Transition to Judiciary	76.4% either plan to or are considering a judicial career — significant implications for judicial recruitment policy.
Q49	Future Professional Interests	37% aspire to Law Officer roles · 34.5% to judiciary · only 8.5% to Bar leadership.
Q50	Roles Being Targeted	Govt empanelment (Central/State) tops at 491, followed by Ministry of Law roles (217) and other institutional roles (206).
Q51	Term Limits in Bar Councils	77.3% support term limits for Bar Council leadership — 55.2% say it would significantly improve opportunities for women.
Q52	Interest in Bar Leadership	77.5% plan to or are exploring Bar/Council leadership — vast untapped potential if structural barriers are addressed.
G — CAREER SATISFACTION & REFORM PRIORITIES (Q53–54)		
Q53	Career Satisfaction	50.9% satisfied/very satisfied; 35.3% neutral; 13.8% dissatisfied — the profession remains aspirational despite its inequities.
Q54	Top Reform Priorities	2,535 responses ranked: (1) Equal access & opportunity · (2) Formal reservation/representation · (3) Mentorship · (4) Financial support · (5) Maternity & returnship · (6) POSH & safety · (7) Childcare · (8) Bar institutional reform · (9) Judicial exam reform · (10) Women's networks.

Most Important Statistics

The survey indicates that the profession remains structurally unequal for women despite the presence of many high-achieving individual practitioners. The following findings stand out as most significant findings from the survey:

Professional journey: 81.3 percent of respondents (2,116 of 2,604) reported that their professional journey has been more difficult than that of their male counterparts. Of these, 41.1 percent described it as much more difficult, while 40.2 percent reported it as slightly more difficult. This perception remains consistent across seniority levels, with about 79 percent of senior women professionals (more than 15 years), 82.2% of mid-career (5-15 years), and 82.3 percent of juniors (below 5 years) reporting similar experiences. It indicates that notwithstanding the number of years a women lawyer invests in the profession the experience of biases and challenges remain consistently high on an average of about 81%.

Sexual harassment: 16.1% of respondents (420) disclosed experiencing sexual harassment in a professional setting. A further 12.7% preferred not to say, which raises the likelihood that actual incidence is higher than the disclosed figure. Of those who reported or sought any remedy, 57% faced backlash in some or the other manner.

Burnout and well-being: 84 % of respondents reported experiencing work-related stress or burnout at least occasionally in the twelve months preceding the survey, with 26.1 percent indicating that they experienced it very often. The prevalence was highest among early-career advocates with 0 to 5 years of practice, where approximately 94.4 % reported such experiences. This figure points towards the likelihood of attrition of young women lawyers in the profession.

First-generation lawyers: 83.1% of respondents are first-generation lawyers with no immediate family member in the legal profession. It indicates the absence of inherited professional networks and guidance that continues to be a significant disadvantage for women entering the profession. However, it also indicates that despite the lack of professional inheritance, legal profession remains aspirational for women.

Childcare and deferral: Out of the total 2,604 respondents, the question was marked as applicable by 1,139 respondents (43.7%). Among them, 57.4% (654) reported receiving accommodation for caregiving responsibilities, while 42.7% (486) did not. These findings indicate that more than four in ten women who sought such accommodation were denied support.

Leadership exclusion: 51.9% said they plan to take up leadership in Bar Councils and Bar Associations, while 25.6% are still exploring this option. Only 21.4% said no, whereas 1.1% did not attempt the question. The appetite for leadership is considerable i.e., 77.5% particularly when viewed alongside the data on barriers.

Top Reform Priorities Identified by Respondents

Question 54 of the survey invited open-ended responses on the top three reforms needed to improve the status of women advocates. A thematic analysis of 2,535 substantive responses identified the following priority clusters, listed in order of frequency:

Rank	Reform Priority Theme	Characteristic Demand
1	Equal access and equal opportunity	End gender-based discrimination in work allocation, briefing, and empanelment
2	Formal reservation and representation	Mandatory minimum quotas in panels, judicial appointments, and Bar leadership
3	Mentorship and structured guidance	Structured formal mentorship for early-career women advocates
4	Financial support in early years	Stipends, minimum income guarantees, and equal pay mechanisms
5	Maternity protection and returnship	Formal maternity leave policy, returnship programmes, and matter deferral rights
6	Safe work environments and POSH	Strict implementation of POSH, safe Bar rooms, and safe travel support
7	Childcare infrastructure	Creches, childcare support, and flexible hearing schedules
8	Bar Council and institutional reform	Term limits, transparent elections, and stronger grievance redressal
9	Judicial exam and appointment reform	Uniform syllabus, predictable calendars, and gender-sensitive exam support
10	Women's networking infrastructure	State-wide women advocates' networks and Bar-sponsored associations

Note: Rankings are based on thematic frequency across 2,535 open-text responses to Question 54. Multiple themes could be expressed in a single response.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background: Women in the Indian Legal Profession

Women have been formally admitted to the Indian Bar since the Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, 1923. However, more than a century later, systemic inequalities persist across nearly every stage of a woman legal professional's career, from the allocation of work as an associate in a chamber, to being designated as senior advocates, judicial appointments, and participation in Bar leadership.

Although the proportion of women enrolled with State Bar Councils has increased steadily since the 1990s, this growth has not translated to higher levels. Representation declines sharply in senior designations, the judiciary, and Bar leadership, where women continue to remain a small minority. The recent intervention of the Supreme Court mandating 30 percent representation of women in Bar Councils and associations marks an important step towards addressing this imbalance.

Existing scholarship identifies the causes of this gap, including financial precarity in early practice, exclusion from professional networks, disproportionate domestic responsibilities, workplace harassment, and the absence of institutional support such as maternity protections or returnship pathways. However, comprehensive, large scale empirical data capturing these experiences across jurisdictions has remained unknown inspiring this study.

1.2 Purpose and Importance of This Empirical Study

This study was conducted to fill that data gap. It sought to document, with statistical precision, the lived experiences of women legal professionals in India. The premise was simple: policy and institutional reform need evidence. Anecdotal accounts and qualitative interviews, however valuable, cannot drive systemic change in the way that nationally representative survey data can.

The SCBA Survey is, to the best of our knowledge, one of the most expansive national surveys of women legal professionals in India. It covered 54 questions across seven sections, addressed issues ranging from office infrastructure to sexual harassment to views on judicial reservation, and gathered 2,604 responses from advocates with experience ranging from under a year to more than fifteen years of practice.

1.3 Scope of the Survey

The survey was distributed digitally to women legal professionals across the country. Participation was voluntary and responses were recorded without identifying individuals. The survey covered 23 named State Bar Councils plus 113 respondents put in a separate category who preferred not to disclose their Bar Council affiliation.

Geographically, the survey achieved coverage across North India (Delhi, Punjab and Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh), West India (Maharashtra and Goa, Gujarat), South India (Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh), East India (West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand), Central India (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh), and North-East India (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, Manipur, Meghalaya). Although the distribution is not uniform and some jurisdictions are over-represented, the breadth of coverage provides a meaningful national picture.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Survey Design and Structure

The SCBA Survey comprised 54 structured questions organised into seven sections, labelled 'A' through 'G'. Section A covered demographic profile (Questions 1 to 15). Section B addressed office, infrastructure and technology (Questions 16 to 22). Section C examined experience, comparative gender-based advantages and disadvantages, and bias (Questions 23 to 28). Section D dealt with challenges, mentorship, and well-being (Questions 29 to 34). Section E focused on marriage, motherhood, and family responsibilities (Questions 35 to 45). Section F covered leadership and institutional participation (Questions 46 to 52). Section G addressed career satisfaction and reform priorities (Questions 53 to 54).

Questions were a combination of single-select, multi-select, and open-text formats. Multi-select questions allowed respondents to choose all applicable options, and responses have been analysed accordingly. The final open-text question (Question 54) invited up to 300 words on the top three reforms needed to improve the status of women legal professionals. Certain questions permitted multiple responses; accordingly, the percentages reported are not mutually exclusive and may not aggregate to 100%. Further, in questions based on sub-sets of respondents, percentages are calculated with reference to the relevant sub-sample and not the overall respondent base.

2.2 Sample Size and Coverage

The final dataset contains 2,604 responses. Responses were collected through a broad, open distribution process. The survey was circulated to all State Bar Councils and Bar Associations through formal communication, and was widely publicised through social media platforms and news portals, ensuring accessibility to women advocates across jurisdictions. While participation was voluntary, the wide dissemination and inclusive outreach enabled responses from a diverse and geographically representative set of women advocates. The large sample size and coverage across jurisdictions lend substantial credibility and relevance to the findings.

2.3 Data Limitations

While analysing the data several limitations were encountered. First, the survey is self-reported. Underreporting of sensitive issues such as sexual harassment and backlash cannot be ruled out due to privacy concerns. Second, the geographic distribution is uneven, with Delhi accounting for roughly one in four responses. Findings may therefore over-represent the views of advocates practising in large metropolitan jurisdictions. Third, because the survey targets women legal professionals specifically, there is no direct male comparator sample within this dataset. Comparisons with male counterparts are based on respondents' own perceptions. Fourth, some questions had notable non-response rates (for example, Questions 26 and 37), which are noted in the relevant chapters. Fifth, as already indicated, 113 respondents did not clearly identify their Bar Council affiliations. Sixth, women legal professionals have been taken as a homogenised category without any taking into account any intersectionality including caste or religion amongst others. Seventh, at some places for the sake of calculation with clarity – nearest approximate value has been taken i.e., the figures have been rounded off.

² Three rows were removed from the raw dataset of 2,607 entries (three exact duplicates). Six additional entries with fully non-substantive open-text responses (single characters or placeholders) were noted but retained as valid for all closed-format questions. The dataset covers 23 State Bar Councils and includes a category for respondents who preferred not to disclose their Bar Council affiliation (113 respondents, 4.4%)

2.4 Analytical Approach

The analysis is primarily descriptive. Frequency distributions and percentages are reported for all closed-format questions. Cross-tabulations are reported where they yield meaningful insight, particularly for seniority versus discrimination, family status versus career impact, and years of practice versus burnout. Open-text responses to Question 54 were subjected to a thematic clustering exercise, with similar responses grouped into broad reform themes. All percentages are calculated against the total cleaned sample of 2,604 unless otherwise specified (for example, where a question was applicable only to a subset of respondents).

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CHAPTER 3: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Survey Section A | Questions 1 to 15

3.1 State Bar Council Distribution (Question 1)

Respondents were enrolled across 23 State Bar Councils. Table 3.1 presents the full distribution. Delhi accounts for the largest share (25.40%), followed by Maharashtra and Goa (12.1%), and Punjab and Haryana (11.6%). These three councils together represent approximately half of the total sample. North-East India is the least represented region, with Manipur (0.2 %) and Meghalaya (0.1%) having very small samples. Findings for these two jurisdictions should be interpreted with caution.

State Bar Council	Percentage
Bar Council of Delhi	25.40%
Bar Council of Maharashtra and Goa	12.1%
Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana	11.6%
Bar Council of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry	7.3%
Bar Council of Telangana	5.0%
Bar Council of Uttar Pradesh	4.9%
Bar Council of Madhya Pradesh	4.5%
Bar Council of Rajasthan	2.9%
Bar Council of West Bengal	2.8%
Bar Council of Kerala	2.6%
Bar Council of Karnataka	2.5%
Bar Council of Andhra Pradesh	2.3%
Bar Council of Gujarat	2.0%
Bar Council of Odisha	1.8%
Bar Council of Himachal Pradesh	1.6%
Bar Council of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh	1.5%
Bar Council of Bihar	1.2%
Bar Council of Jharkhand	1.0%

Bar Council of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim	0.9%
Bar Council of Chhattisgarh	0.8%
Bar Council of Uttarakhand	0.7%
Bar Council of Manipur	0.2%
Bar Council of Meghalaya	0.1%
Preferred Not to Disclose/ could not be ascertained	4.3%
TOTAL	100.0%

3.2 Years of Practice (Question 2)

The survey captured a wide spread of experience levels. The largest group comprises early-career legal professionals with 0 to 5 years of practice, representing 37.4% of the sample. Advocates with more than 15 years of practice form the second-largest group at 30.7%, followed by 5 to 10 years (17.9%) and 10 to 15 years (14.0%).

Years of Practice	Respondents	Percentage
0 to 5 years	974	37.4%
5 to 10 years	465	17.9%
10 to 15 years	366	14.0%
More than 15 years	799	30.7%
Total (valid responses)	2,604	100.0%

Note: Table 3.2: Years of practice distribution. The preponderance of early-career advocates (0 to 5 years) reflects both the growth of the profession and the challenges of retention that the survey also documents.

3.3 Primary Place of Practice (Question 3)

The majority of respondents practice in District Courts (52.9%, 1,378 respondents), followed by High Courts (28.8%) and the Supreme Court of India (13.0%). A smaller proportion practice in advisory or non-litigation roles (2.8%) or before Tribunals (2.5%).

Forum	Respondents	Percentage
District Courts	1,378	52.9%

High Court	749	28.8%
Supreme Court of India	338	13.0%
Advisory / Non-Litigation	74	2.8%
Tribunals	65	2.5%
Total (valid responses)	2,604	100.0%

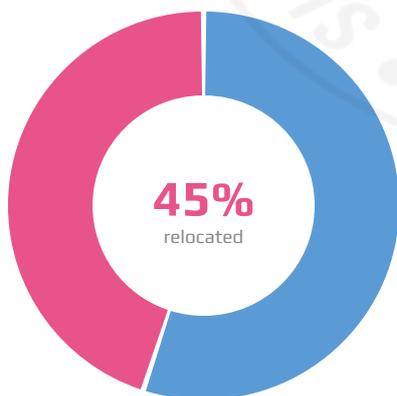
Note: Table 3.3: Primary practice forum. The concentration at the District Court level corresponds with the distribution of women lawyers across the country, where the grassroot litigation happens.

3.4 Relocation for Practice (Question 4)

55.0% of respondents indicated that relocation was not applicable, in contrast to 45% for whom it was relevant meaning thereby they continue to practice in the same location as their primary place of enrolment. Among those who had relocated, for owing to family responsibilities, marriage or spouse/partners transfer amounts to (586, 50%), whereas, better professional opportunities, higher education/ specialisation amounts to (453, 38.6%) and other responses counted for 11.4%. The proportion of marriage and family-driven relocation illustrates a distinctive professional constraint for women, wherein career trajectory is frequently subordinated to domestic circumstances.

OVERALL SAMPLE

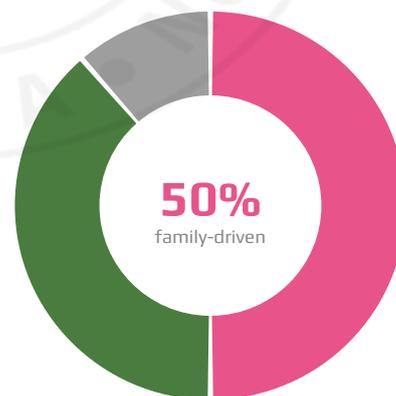
Relocation applicability



- Not applicable (same location) 55%
- Relocated 45%

AMONG THOSE WHO RELOCATED

Reasons for relocation



- Family, marriage & spouse/partner transfer 50%
- Better professional opportunities & higher education 38.6%
- Other reasons 11.4%

3.5 Practice Set-Up (Question 5)

More than half of all respondents (58.2 %) reported practising as independent sole practitioners. This is significant, as sole practice often entails limited access to infrastructure, mentorship, and professional networks, and may reflect both structural barriers to entry into chambers (reference Question 20) or firms and a degree of individual resilience and self-reliance. A further 27.6 percent work as associates in chambers, while boutique firms (4.7 percent), medium or large law firms (2.8 percent), and in-house or corporate roles (1.8 percent) account for smaller shares.

Practice Set-Up	Percentage
Independent (sole practitioner)	58.2%
Junior in a Chamber	27.6%
Boutique firm (5 to 10 lawyers)	4.7%
Medium / Large law firm (10+ lawyers)	2.8%
In-house / Corporate counsel	1.8%
Other / combination	4.9%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 3.5: Practice set-up.

3.6 Professional Position (Question 6)

The overwhelming majority of respondents are Advocates 87.6. Advocates-on-Record at the Supreme Court account for 4.8%. Designated Senior Advocates at the High Court level number 0.7% and at the Supreme Court level 0.4%, working at law firms 3.7% and advocates working at law firm 2.8%. These proportions confirm the well-known pattern of women's under-representation in senior designations.

3.7 Senior Advocate Designation (Question 7)

When asked whether designation as a Senior Advocate is easier for men or women, 53.9% of respondents said it is easier for men. Only 1.7% said it is easier for women. A further 26.7% believed the process is the same for both, and 16.1% said they could not say, whereas, 1.6 % chose not to attempt the question. The strong majority perception that designation processes favour men reflect barriers that appear structural rather than merely cultural.

3.8 Positions Held and Work Frequency (Questions 8 and 9)

64.5% of respondents have not served in any designated government or institutional position (Panel Counsel, Standing Counsel, Additional Advocate General, etc.). None of the Respondents have ever served either as Attorney General for India, Solicitor General of India, Additional Solicitor General of India (Supreme Court), Advocate General of any State, Senior

Additional Advocate General. Only 5 (0.19%) have served as Additional Advocate General out of 2604 respondents and 4 have served as Deputy Advocate General and 1 (0.038%) has served as Additional Solicitor General (High Court), whereas, 694 (26.65%) respondents have been panel advocates at some point of time, 108 (4.14%) have been standing counsels. Among those who held such positions and answered Question 9, only 646 respondents i.e., 53.7% received work regularly and consistently. 14.3% (172) received work rarely, 23.87 % (286) have received work occasionally and 8.06% almost never.

3.9 Reservation in Legal Services Panels (Question 10)

A strong majority supports mandatory minimum representation of women lawyers in panels such as National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and State and District Legal Services Authorities. 59.4% favour mandatory minimum representation, while 23.8% prefer encouragement through guidelines rather than reservation. Only 12.3% oppose any form of reservation, while 4.5% were unsure.

3.10 Mandatory Policy on Government Panels (Question 11)

67.28 % (1,752) of respondents support a mandatory government policy to ensure adequate representation of women advocates as panel counsel, law officers (including Advocate General and Additional Advocate General), and minimum allocation of government work. This is the single largest majority response across any policy question in the survey.

3.11 Government Panel Appointments and Gender (Question 12)

55.5% of respondents view government panel appointments as easier for men than for women. 17.0% believe there should be a minimum representation of women advocates on government panels, and 12.7% see no gender differential.

3.12 Area of Practice (Question 13)

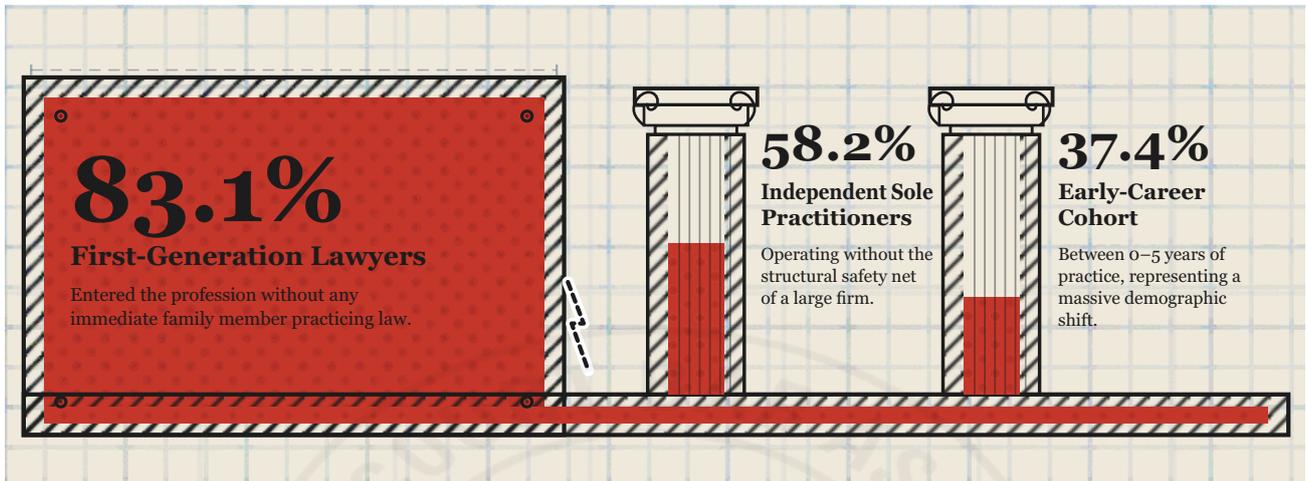
Question 13 was a multi select question. Civil law (71.3 percent), family and matrimonial law (65.4 percent), and criminal law (64.5 percent) emerge as the most common areas of practice. Constitutional and writ matters (31.9 percent) and consumer law (31.2 percent) follow. This concentration in civil, family, and criminal work reflects the predominance of District Court practice. Notably, the strong presence of women in criminal law indicates a shift away from the conventional perception that it is primarily a male dominated field.

3.13 Specialisation and Professional Opportunities (Question 14)

56.9% of respondents (1,483) believe their area of specialisation has at some point affected their access to professional opportunities due to gender-based expectations. 23.8% answered in negative, and 19.3% were not sure. This finding suggests that gender stereotyping affects not just whether women are in the profession but what kinds of work they are expected to do within it.

3.14 First-Generation Lawyer (Question 15)

83.1% of respondents (2,165) are first-generation lawyers with no immediate family member in the legal profession. This is a striking figure. In a profession where informal networks, chambers, and professional connections are built over generations, being the first in the family to enter law creates a structural disadvantage that is particularly acute for women, who simultaneously face gender-based exclusions on top of their first-generation status.



CHAPTER 4: OFFICE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

Survey Section B | Questions 16 to 22

4.1 Primary Office Location (Question 16)

Access to a professional workspace proximate to the court is a fundamental requirement for effective legal practice. The survey found significant variation in office proximity among respondents.

Office Location	Percentage
Within 5 to 10 km of court	29.4%
More than 10 km (same city)	22.3%
Walkable distance from court	19.0%
No dedicated office	12.0%
Mainly work from home	9.8%
Different city	3.9%
Other	3.6%
Total	100.0%

Note: Table 4.1: Office proximity to court.

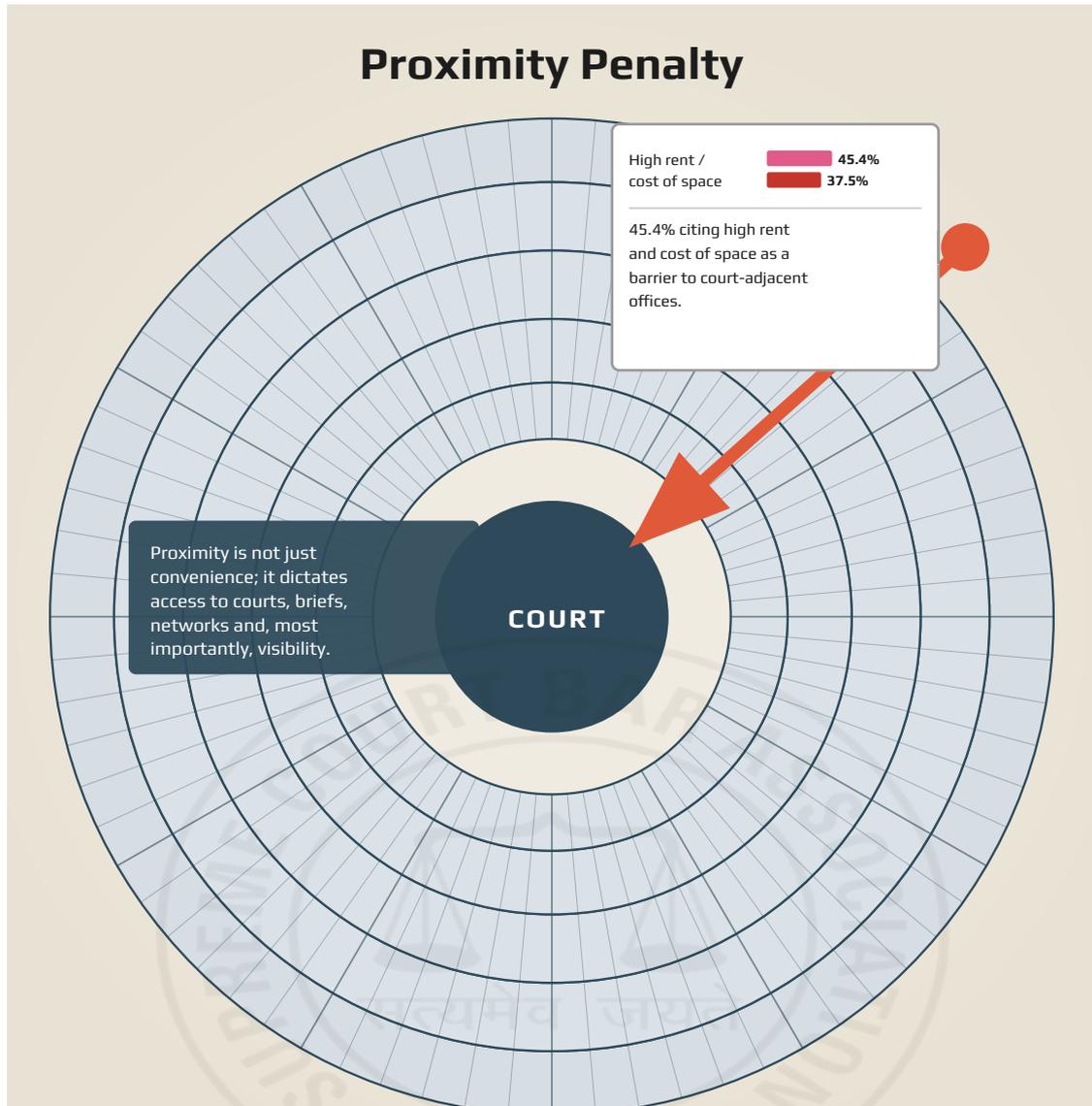
4.2 Impact of Proximity (Question 17)

When asked whether having an office or chamber near the court helps or will help their practice, 63.6% said yes, significantly. A further 20.2% said yes, to some extent. Only 10.8% said no. Whereas, 5.4% either chose not applicable or did not answer the question. The clear consensus that proximity matters make the lack of accessible, affordable office space near courts a concrete infrastructure barrier, not merely a convenience issue.

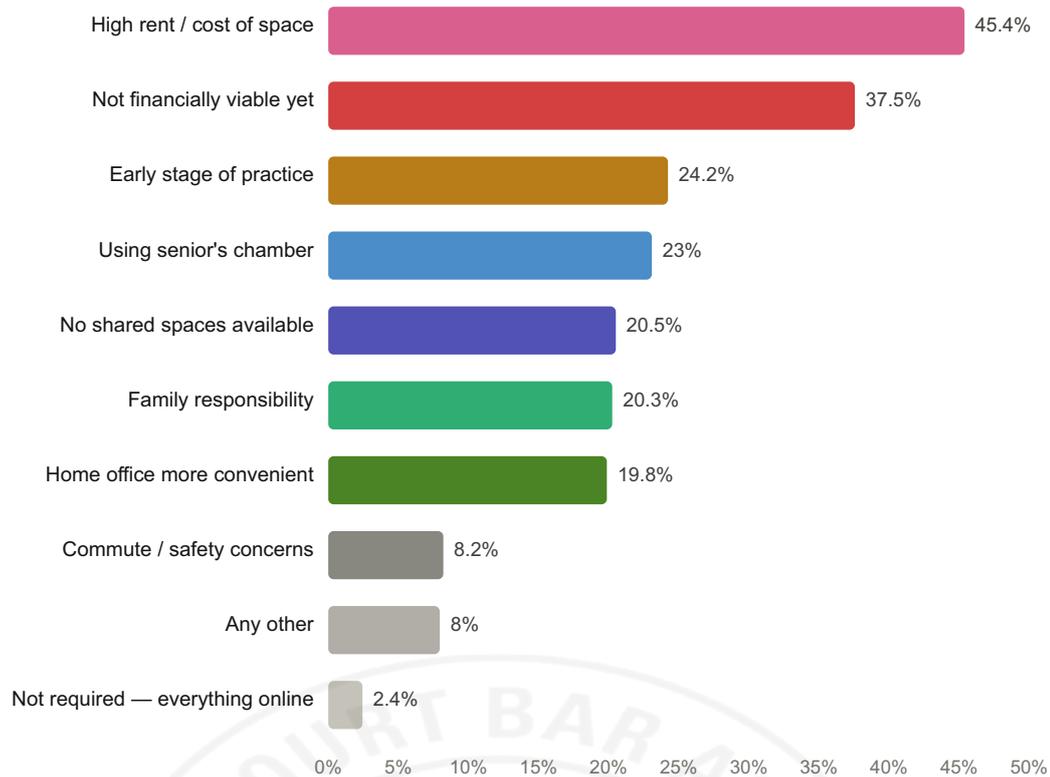
4.3 Reasons for Not Having an Office Near Court (Question 18)

Of the 2,604 respondents surveyed, only 14.6% reported having an office or chamber near the court, and therefore did not attempt this question. The remaining 2,225 respondents identified the barriers preventing them from maintaining a dedicated workspace near courts.

Proximity Penalty



Among these, high rent and cost of space emerged as the most significant barrier, cited by 45.4% respondents, followed by not being financially viable yet at 37.5% and early stage of practice at 24.2%. Using a senior's chamber was noted by respondents 23.0%, while no shared spaces being available was cited by 20.5%. Family responsibility was identified as a barrier by respondents 20.3%, closely followed by home office being more convenient for work-life balance at 19.8%. Commute and public transport or safety concerns were raised by 8.2% respondents, and 8.0% indicated other reasons. The least cited barrier was the perception that a physical workspace is not required as everything is online, noted by only 2.4% respondents.



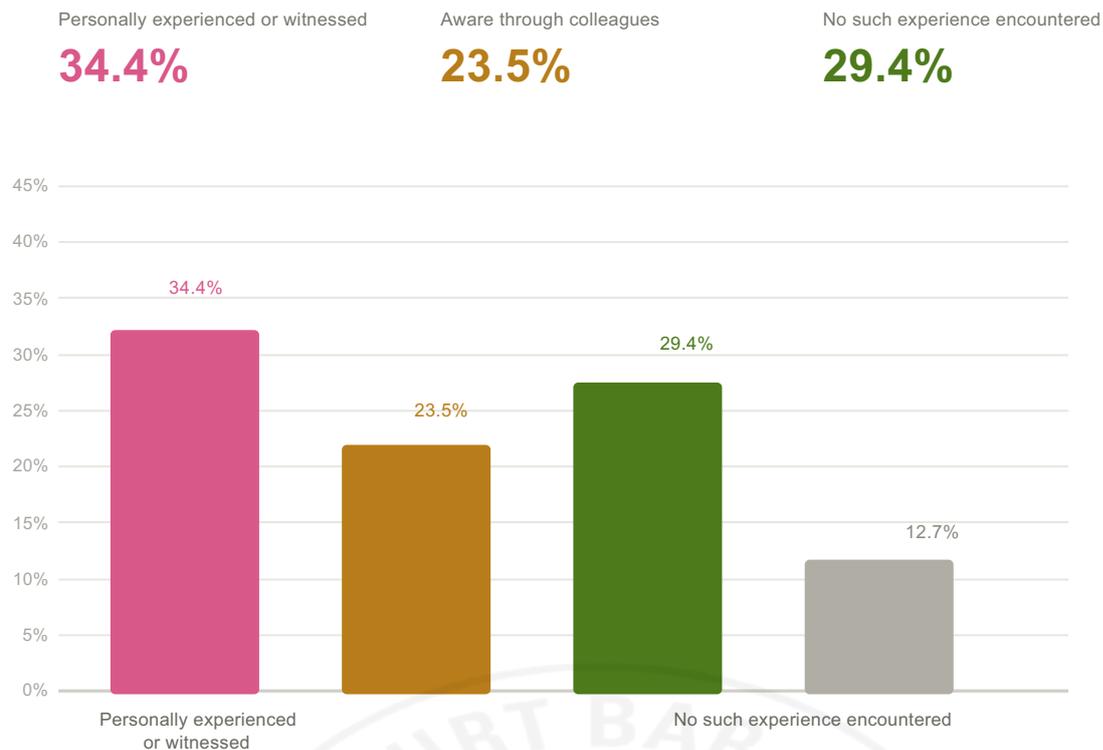
The data reveals a layered picture of structural and economic exclusion — financial unviability and high real estate costs together affect well over half the respondents, while the non-trivial incidence of family responsibility and safety concerns points to gendered dimensions of workspace access that go beyond mere economics.

4.4 Access to Professional Resources (Question 19)

21.0% of respondents reported having access to none of the listed professional resources, which included physical law libraries, paid legal databases, free online platforms, research assistance, clerical and secretarial staff, stable internet and devices, and case management software. Physical law libraries are the most commonly accessed resource at 47.65%. Almost about 75% women legal professionals do not have access to paid legal databases. About 45% women rely on free legal database for their practice. 17.58% have access to research assistance. About 77% women do not have access to clerical staff, whereas, 56% women lawyers do not have access to stable internet and devices. Only about 14.9% have access to case management software. The overall picture is one of significant resource deficiency with respect to women legal professionals.

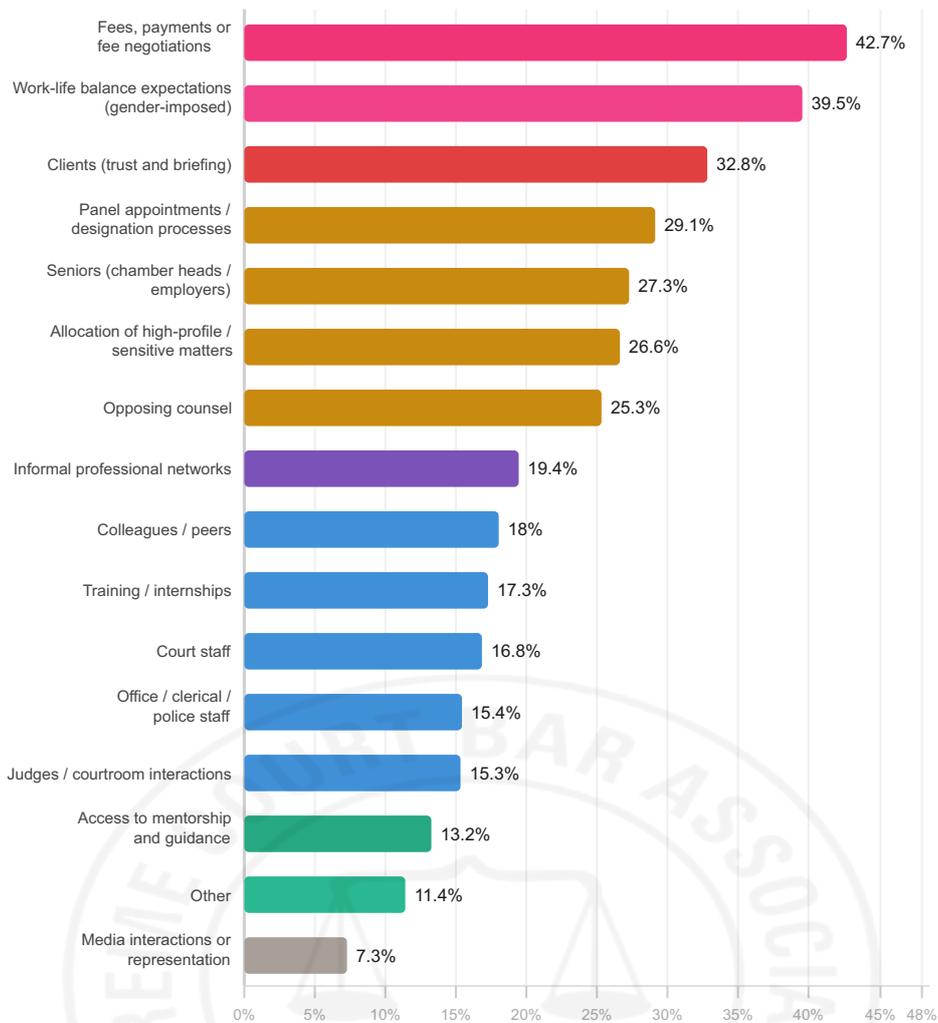
4.5 Gender Bias in Professional Settings (Question 20)

34.4% of respondents have personally experienced or witnessed practices in law offices, chambers, court registries, or police stations that discourage women lawyers and adversely impact their confidence. A further 23.5% are aware of such practices through colleagues. Only 29.4% report not having encountered such practices. This means that fewer than three in ten respondents have had no direct or indirect experience of institutional gender bias in their practice environment, nearly 6 out of 10 women acknowledged gender bias.

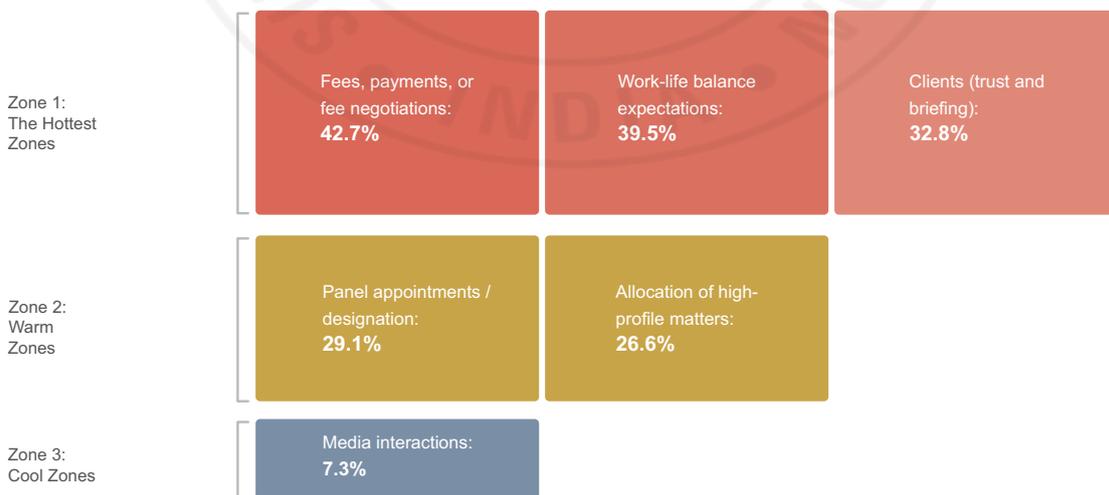


4.6 Contexts of Gender Bias (Question 21)

In Question 21 respondents were asked to identify areas where they had experienced gender bias, with multiple selections permitted. Fees, payments, or fee negotiations emerged as the most cited domain at 42.7%, followed closely by work-life balance expectations imposed due to gender at 39.5%. Clients - encompassing issues of trust and briefing, were identified by 32.8%, while panel appointments and designation processes were flagged by 29.1% and allocation of important, high-profile, or sensitive matters by 26.6%. Seniors (chamber heads or employers) were cited by 27.3% of respondents, and opposing counsel by 25.3%. Informal professional networks including briefing, networking, and referrals were identified by 19.4%, with colleagues and peers at 18.0% and court staff at 16.8%. Office, clerical, and police staff were cited by 15.4%, and judges or courtroom interactions by 15.3%. Training and internships were flagged by 17.3%, and access to mentorship and professional guidance by 13.2%. Media interactions or representation recorded the lowest incidence at 7.3%, while other responses accounted for 11.4%.

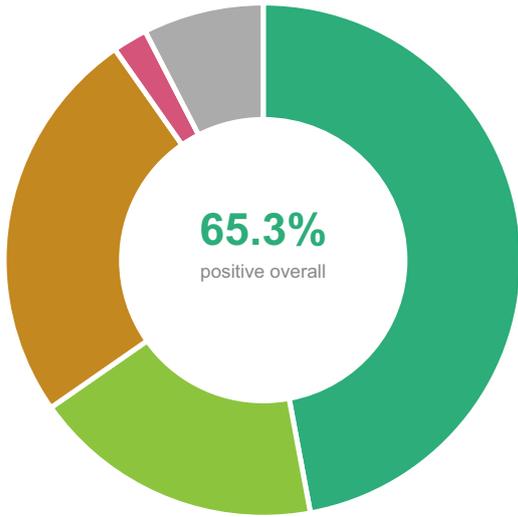


"Heat Map" matrix of Professional Bias



4.7 Impact of Technology and E-Courts (Question 22)

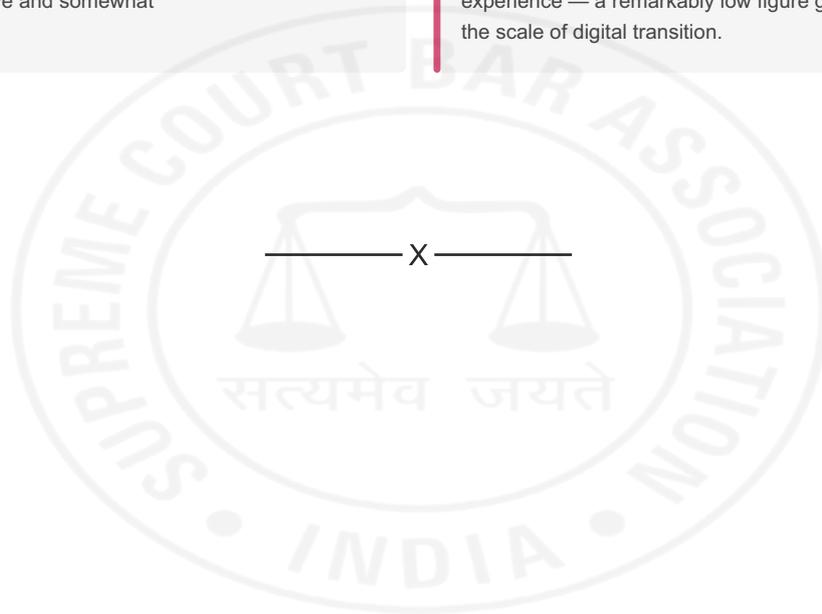
The survey asked respondents about the impact of technology, including e-courts and virtual hearings, on their work. The response was substantially positive. 47.1% said the impact has been very positive, and a further 18.2% said somewhat positive. 25.0% reported mixed experiences. Only 2.1% said the impact has been mostly negative.



Very positive	47.1%
Somewhat positive	18.2%
Mixed experiences	25%
Mostly negative	2.1%
No response / other	7.6%

65.3% report a positive impact overall — combining very positive and somewhat positive responses.

Only **2.1%** report a mostly negative experience — a remarkably low figure given the scale of digital transition.



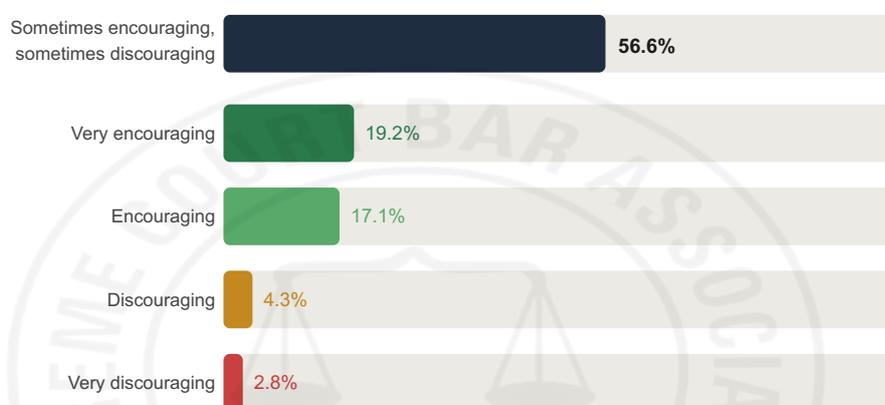
CHAPTER 5: EXPERIENCE, COMPARISON AND BIAS

Survey Section C | Questions 23 to 28

5.1 Overall Experience as a Woman Advocate (Question 23)

When asked to describe their overall experience as a woman advocate, a majority of respondents 56.6 % characterised it as “sometimes encouraging, sometimes discouraging,” reflecting the mixed and often uneven nature of their professional journeys. A total of 63.7 % women lawyers have found the profession to be discouraging at some point of their career. Only 19.2 % described their experience as very encouraging and 17.1 percent as encouraging. In contrast, 4.3 % reported it as discouraging and 2.8 percent as very discouraging.

63.7% Nearly 2 in 3 women lawyers found the profession discouraging at some point in their career.



5.2 Comparison with Male Counterparts (Question 24)

The survey asked respondents to compare their professional journey with that of male counterparts. 41.1% described their journey as much more difficult and 40.2% as slightly more difficult. Together, 81.3% said their journey has been harder to some degree than that of their male peers. Only 10.9% described their journey as about the same. 2.8% said it has been easier, and 0.6% said much easier.

Comparison with Male Counterparts	Percentage
Much more difficult	41.1%
Slightly more difficult	40.2%
About the same	10.9%
Cannot say	4.4%

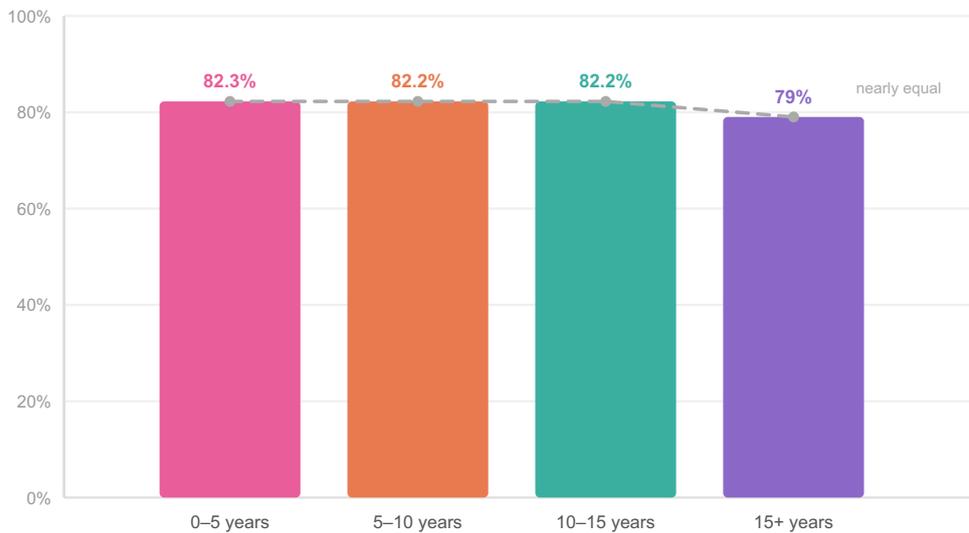
Easier	2.8%
Much easier	0.6%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 5.2: Professional journey compared to male counterparts. 81.3% of respondents describe their journey as harder than that of men, a finding that is consistent across all years of practice.

5.3 Cross-Tabulation: Seniority versus Perceived Difficulty (Questions 2 and 24)

A cross-tabulation of years of practice against the perceived difficulty of professional journey reveals a consistent finding: the sense of greater difficulty relative to male peers does not significantly diminish with experience. Among the most senior group (more than 15 years of practice), 79.0% still describe their journey as harder. Critically, this rate holds almost unchanged across all experience bands.



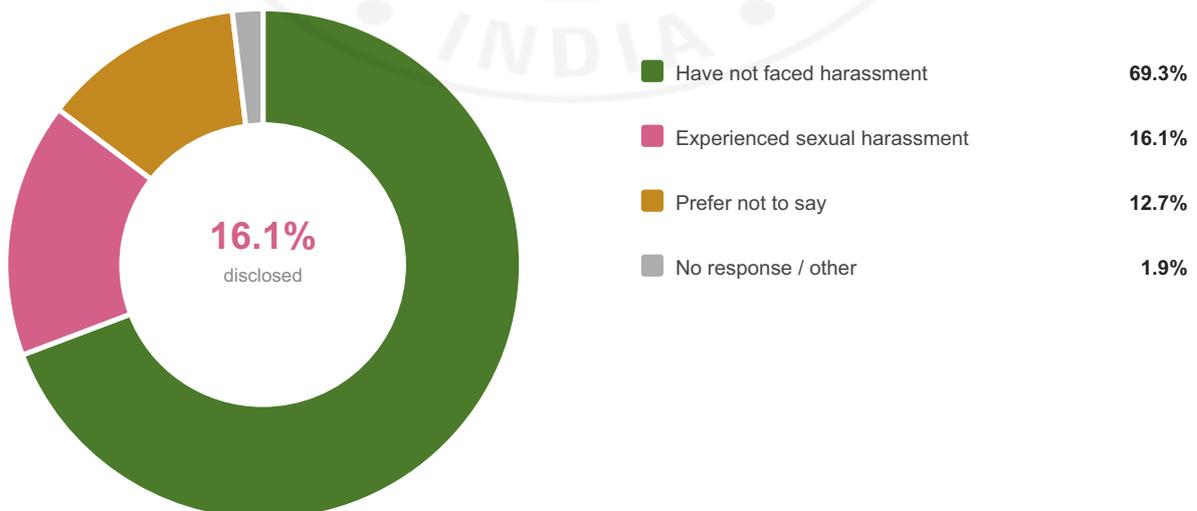


Note: Table 5.3: Cross-tabulation of years of practice versus perceived professional difficulty. The consistency across all cohorts suggests that barriers do not ease as women gain seniority. This challenges the assumption that discrimination is primarily an early-career phenomenon.

5.4 Sexual Harassment (Question 25)

16.1% of respondents disclosed having experienced sexual harassment in a professional setting. 12.7% preferred not to say. Given the documented reluctance to disclose such experiences in professional settings, the actual incidence is likely higher than the disclosed figure. 69.3% said they had not faced harassment.

The 12.7% who preferred not to say represents a significant proportion. In survey research on harassment, 'prefer not to say' responses frequently mask affirmative experiences among respondents who fear identification or professional consequences.



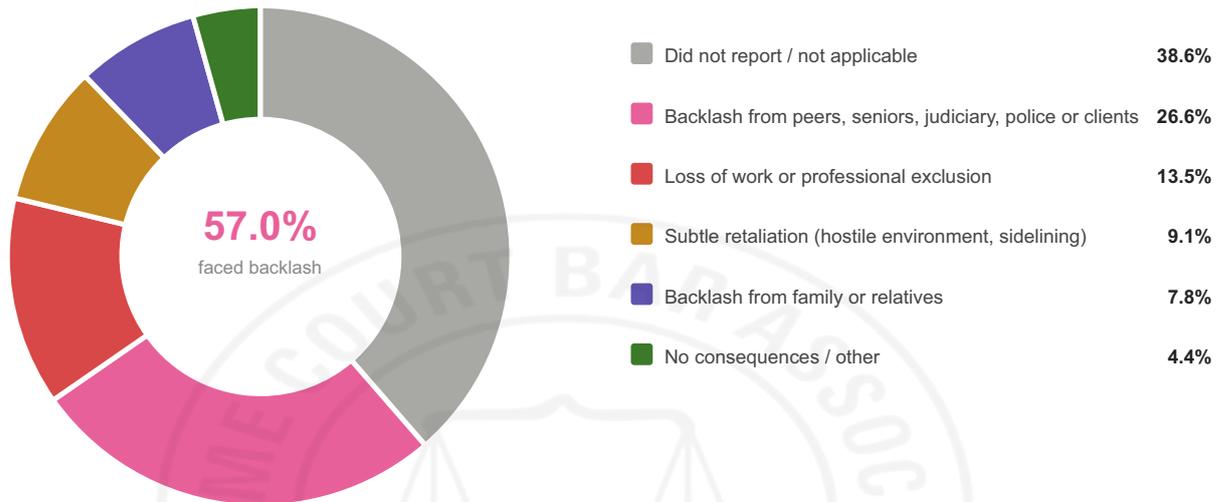
Up to 28.8% may have experienced harassment — if "prefer not to say" responses mask affirmative experiences, as survey research on harassment suggests.

12.7% preferred not to say — a proportion that frequently masks affirmative experiences due to fear of identification or professional consequences.

5.5 Backlash After Reporting (Question 26)

Among those who reported or sought any remedy following harassment, 26.6% experienced backlash from professional peers, colleagues, seniors, the judiciary, police, or clients. 13.5% experienced loss of work opportunities or professional exclusion. 9.1% faced subtle retaliation such as a hostile environment, sidelining, or negative remarks. 7.8% experienced backlash from family members or close relatives.

Significantly, 38.6% selected 'not applicable' because they did not report or seek any remedy. This indicates that a substantial proportion of women who faced harassment chose not to report it, which is consistent with the backlash risks documented above. The fear of consequences serves as a direct deterrent to reporting.



38.6% did not report — the largest single group, consistent with the documented fear of backlash serving as a direct deterrent to reporting.

57.0% who did report faced some form of professional, institutional, or personal backlash — across peers, seniors, judiciary, family, or clients.

5.6 Women Discouraging Other Women (Question 27)

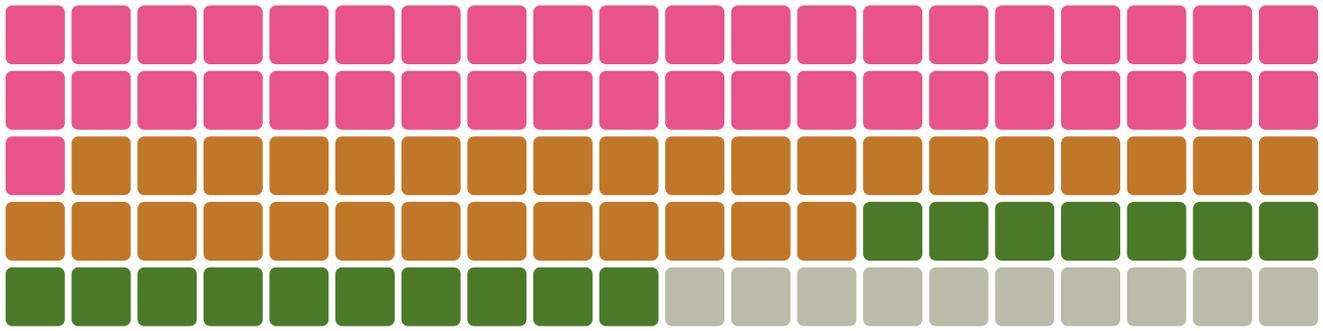
The survey also examined the phenomenon sometimes described as horizontal hostility, where women in a profession can act as gatekeepers against other women. 22.0% of respondents have personally witnessed instances where women lawyers discourage or resist the hiring of other women. A further 22.8% are aware of such instances through colleagues. 29.6% said they have not come across such instances.

The fact that about half of respondents with a view on this question have encountered horizontal hostility is a troubling finding. It suggests that individual behaviour within the profession contributes to its structural inequalities, even as structural factors (financial competition, limited opportunities) often create the incentives for such behaviour.

5.7 Networking Barriers Related to Gender (Question 28)

40.6% of respondents said their gender significantly hinders their ability to network for professional growth. Examples cited in the question include travelling alone at night for work or staying alone overnight at a hotel. A further 31.7% said gender hinders networking to some extent. Together, 72.3% experience gender-based networking barriers, while 17.5% said it does not affect them at all.

Does gender hinder your ability to network?



Each square = 1% of respondents

40.6%

Significantly hinders

31.7%

Hinders to some extent

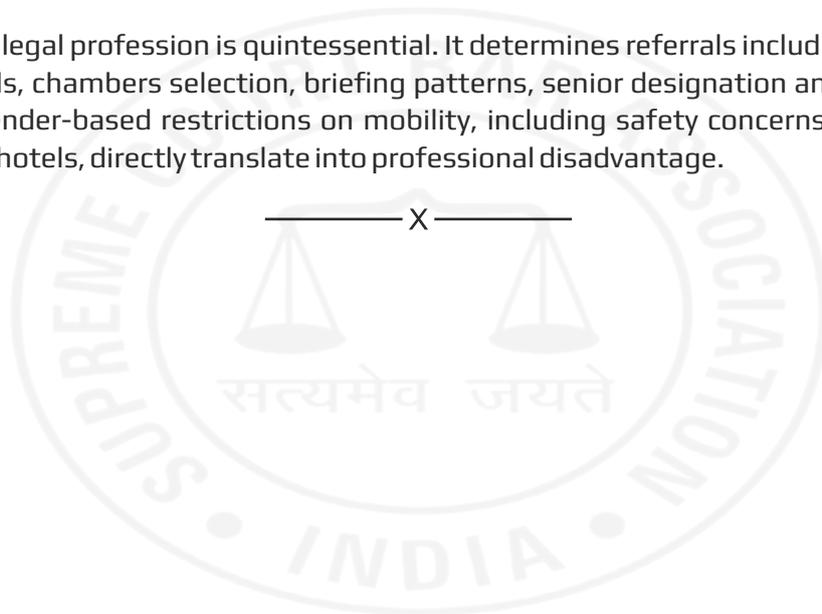
17.5%

No effect

10.2%

No response

Networking in the legal profession is quintessential. It determines referrals including appointment to government panels, chambers selection, briefing patterns, senior designation and access to judicial appointments. Gender-based restrictions on mobility, including safety concerns while travelling at night or staying in hotels, directly translate into professional disadvantage.

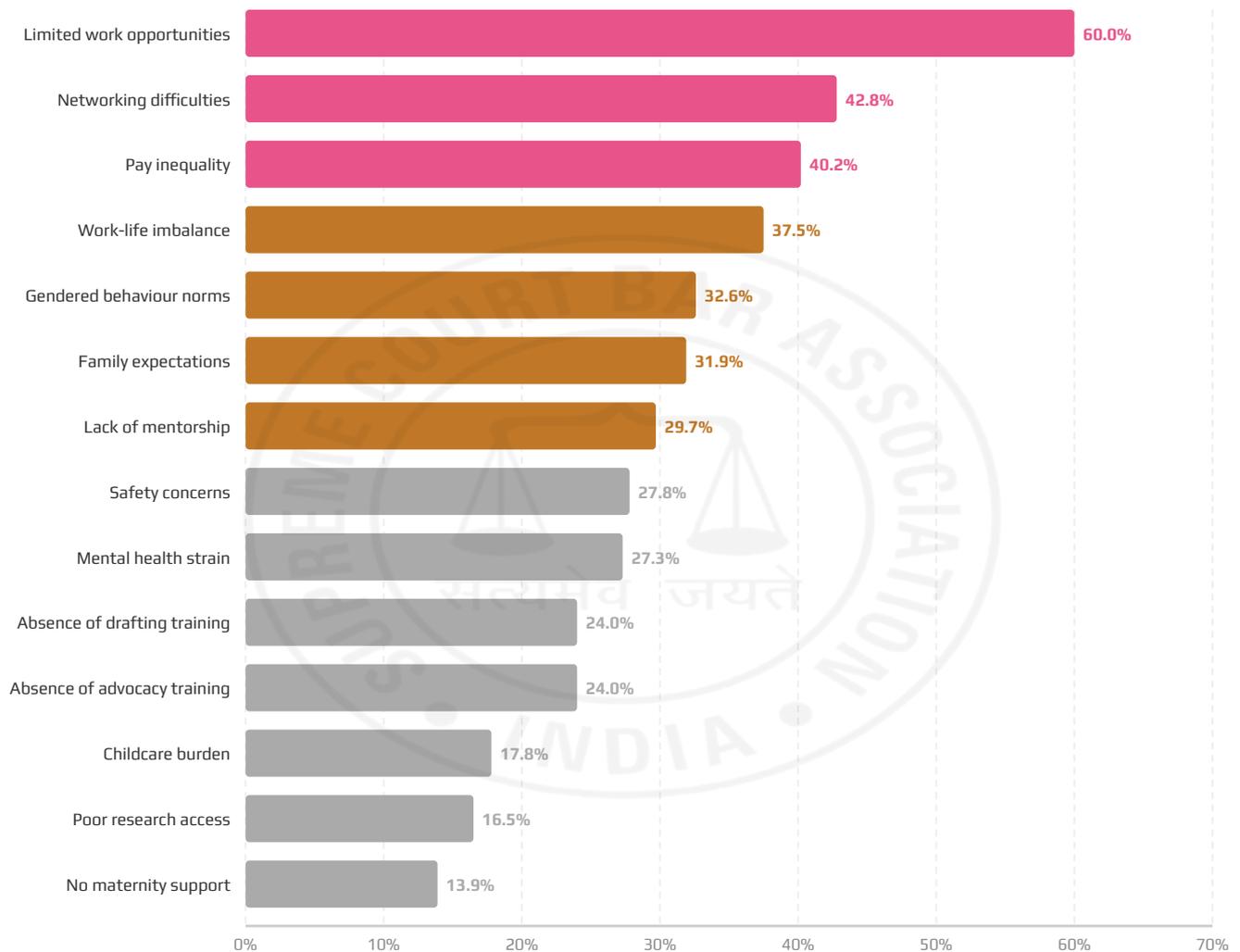


CHAPTER 6: CHALLENGES, MENTORSHIP AND WELL-BEING

Survey Section D | Questions 29 to 34

6.1 Major Challenges (Question 29)

Question 29 was a multi-select question. Respondents could identify multiple challenges from a list. The following analysis reflects the individual frequency of each challenge across all responses. Limited work opportunities emerge as the largest identified challenge amongst the respondents followed by networking difficulties and pay inequality.



Note: Table 6.1: Major challenges identified through multi-select question.

6.2 Mentorship Availability and Quality (Question 30)

54.6% of respondents have some form of mentor, formal or informal. Of these, 74.2% are satisfied with the quality of mentorship. 23.6% are seeking a mentor but do not currently have one. 21.8% do not have a mentor and are not seeking one, which may reflect either satisfaction with informal networks or disengagement from mentorship as a concept. The combination of respondents seeking a mentor and with an unsatisfactory mentor point to an unmet demand for quality guidance of approximately 37.7% women lawyers. It indicates that around 4 women in 10 women are searching for quality mentoring and guidance.

Mentorship Status	Percentage
Yes, formal mentor; very satisfied	31.5%
No, but seeking one	23.6%
No, not seeking	21.8%
Yes, informal mentor; very satisfied	9.1%
Yes, formal mentor; not satisfied	8.3%
Yes, informal mentor; not satisfied	5.8%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 6.2: Mentorship availability and satisfaction.

6.3 Confidence in Grievance Redressal (Question 31)

When asked how confident they are that a complaint about discrimination or harassment would be handled fairly, only 25.6% said very confident. 15.2 % said somewhat confident. 24.8% said it depends on the person or forum. 21.6% said not very confident and 12.8% said not at all confident. Together, 59.2% i.e., every 6 women out of 10 lack confidence in the fairness of grievance redressal mechanisms or their confidence is contingent.

This finding has direct implications for the willingness to report harassment, as documented in Chapter 5. A system where fewer than one in four respondents are highly confident of fair treatment is unlikely to encourage disclosure or reporting.

6.4 Burnout and Work-Related Stress (Question 32)

84.0% of respondents reported experiencing work-related stress or burnout at least sometimes in the twelve months prior to the survey. 26.1% experienced it very often and 21.4% often. Only 6.1% said they never experience burnout.

Burnout Frequency	Percentage
Very often	26.1%
Often	21.4%
Sometimes	36.5%
Rarely	9.9%
Never	6.1%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 6.4: Work-related stress and burnout.

6.5 Judicial Service Examination Reform (Question 33)

Question 33 was a multi-select question on reforms to State Judicial Service examinations. Analysed by individual suggestion, the findings are as follows:

Transparent and uniform examination syllabus: Cited by 59.7% of respondents as a priority.

Support measures for women candidates: Including maternity-related relaxations, age and attempt limits, and exam scheduling, cited by 50.1%.

Adequate representation of women in interview boards: Cited by 46.4%.

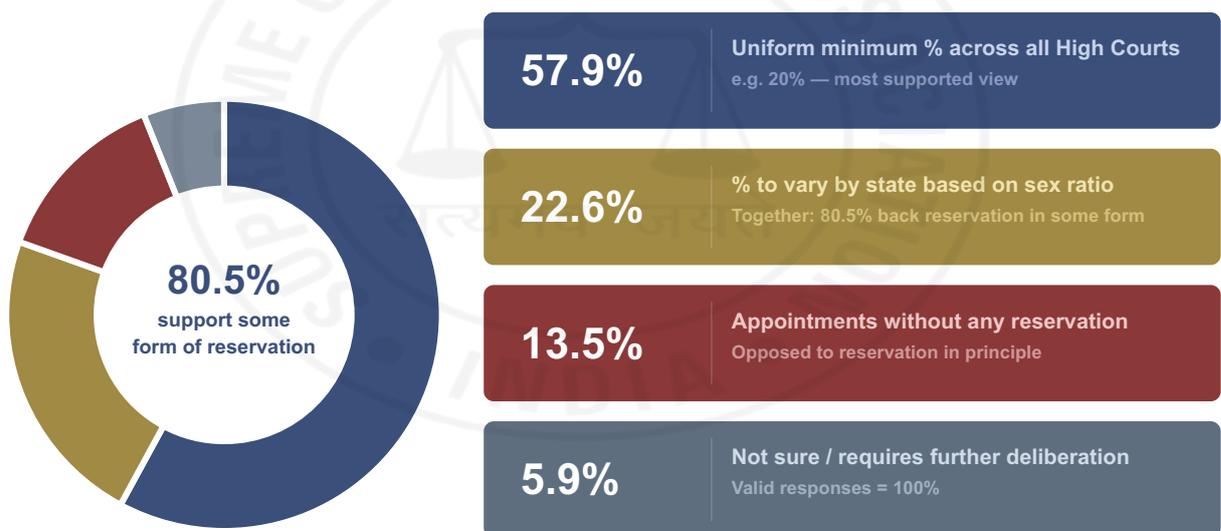
Predictable examination calendars and timely notifications: Cited by 40.9%.

Clear and timely grievance redressal mechanism: Cited by 36.8%.

Only 6.6% were satisfied with the existing process and offered no suggestions. These findings reveal strong dissatisfaction with the current examination system and a clear appetite for structural reform.

6.6 Minimum Reservation for Women in Appointment of Judges (Question 34)

The survey asked whether a minimum percentage of seats for women judges should be ensured in High Courts and the Supreme Court across India. 57.9% supported a uniform minimum percentage across all High Courts, with the survey offering 20% as an example. 22.6% supported a percentage that varies by state based on the sex ratio. Together, 80.5% of valid respondents support some form of minimum reservation. Only 13.5% opposed reservation in principle. About 100 i.e., 3.8 % of the total survey respondents did not attempt to answer the question.



Combined support for reservation (57.9% + 22.6%)

80.5%

80.5% support reservation

Note: Table 6.6: Views on minimum reservation for women judges in High Courts and Supreme Court.

CHAPTER 7: MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD, CARE AND FAMILY

Survey Section E | Questions 35 to 45

7.1 Family Status Distribution (Question 35)

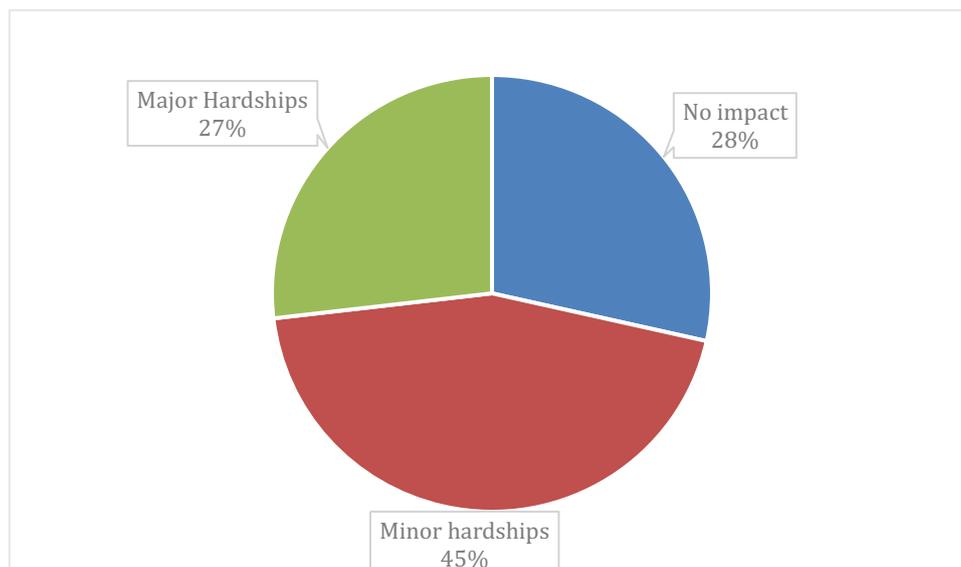
The sample reflects a diverse range of family circumstances. Married with children is the most common status (44.1%), followed by single (36.4%), married without children (10.0%), divorced or separated (3.3%), single mothers (2.5%), widowed (1.6%), and those preferring not to say (2.1%).

Family Status	Percentage
Married, with children	44.1%
Single	36.4%
Married, no children	10.0%
Divorced / Separated	3.3%
Single mother	2.5%
Prefer not to say	2.1%
Widowed	1.6%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 7.1: Current family status of respondents.

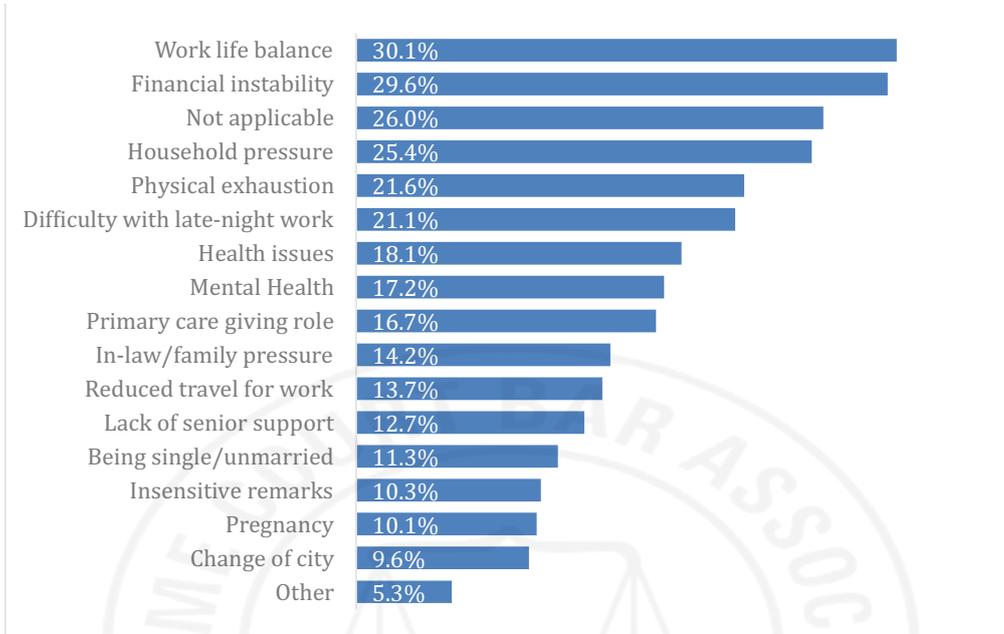
7.2 Impact of Marital Status on Professional Work (Question 36)

26.1% found the question not applicable to their situation. Of the remaining, 44.7% of respondents reported minor hardships from marital status, and 26.8% reported major hardships. Combined, 71.5% have experienced some form of professional impact from their marital status. 28.5% reported no impact.



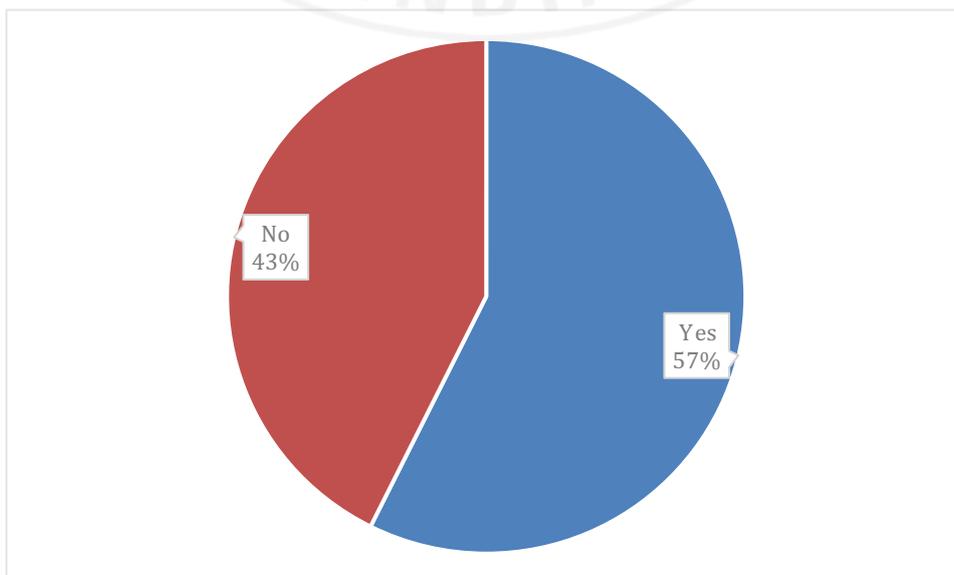
7.3 Marital Status and Hardships faced (Question 37)

The most cited specific hardships included work-life balance difficulties, household pressure, financial instability linked to marital transition, being the primary care-giving role, and physical exhaustion. The relatively high citation of 'being single or unmarried' as a source of hardship reflects a dual discriminatory expectation: married women face domestic burden penalties, while unmarried women sometimes face credibility challenges in certain practice settings.



7.4 Childcare Support (Question 38)

Out of the total 2,604 respondents, the question was marked as applicable by 1,139 respondents. Among them, 57.3% reported receiving accommodation for caregiving responsibilities, while 42.7% did not. These findings indicate that more than four in ten women who sought such accommodation were denied support.



7.5 Deferral of Matters on Childbirth (Question 39)

Among the respondents to whom Question 39 was applicable, 55.2% faced difficulties in getting their matters deferred when they had a child. 44.8% did not face such difficulties. This finding suggests that more than half of women who needed matter deferrals around childbirth encountered resistance, an absence of formal institutional mechanism that is difficult to justify in a profession that advocates for justice.

7.6 Family Responsibilities and Professional Growth (Question 40)

Among the 59.13 % respondents for whom this question was applicable (those with children or caregiving responsibilities), the responses were as follows:

40.3% reported that family responsibilities have required significant role-balancing at home and work.

30.3% said it limits their professional opportunities.

18.9% said having children has positively supported their career.

10.6 % said it has not significantly affected their career.

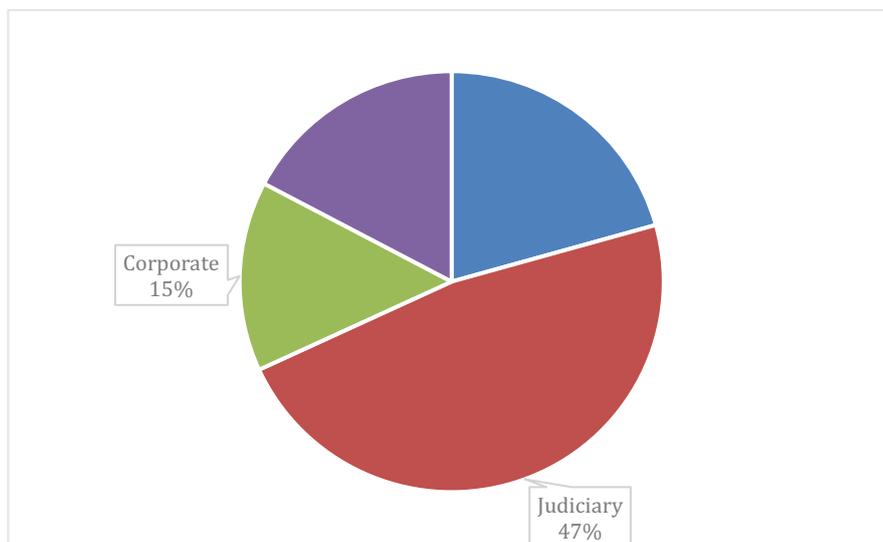
7.7 Career Advice: Daughter versus Son (Questions 41 and 42)

When asked about preferred professional paths within the legal field for their children, 43.5% of respondents indicated no specific preference, deferring to the child's own choice. Among those with a preference, Judiciary was the most favoured option 22.8% and independent legal practice at only 8.9%.

72.1 % said their choice would not vary between a daughter and a son. 14.8 % said it would vary significantly and 13.1 % said it would vary to some extent. The combination of those who would vary their advice suggests that many women advocates still perceive the profession as carrying different risks or paths based on gender, even while advising the next generation.

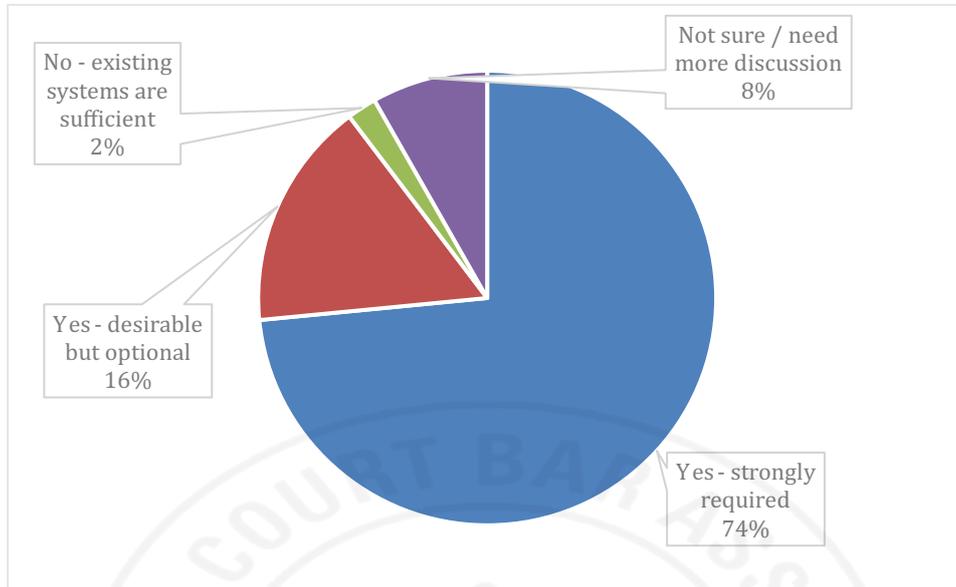
7.8 Career Guidance for Daughters (Question 43)

When specifically asked which career path in law they would recommend to a daughter or close female family member, the Judiciary was the clear first choice at 47.5% (1,237), followed by litigation (20.7%), academics (17.3%), and corporate law (14.5%). The preference for the judiciary is particularly interesting, as it suggests that many women advocates see the bench as offering greater stability, respect, and protection from the untold and informal hierarchies of the bar.



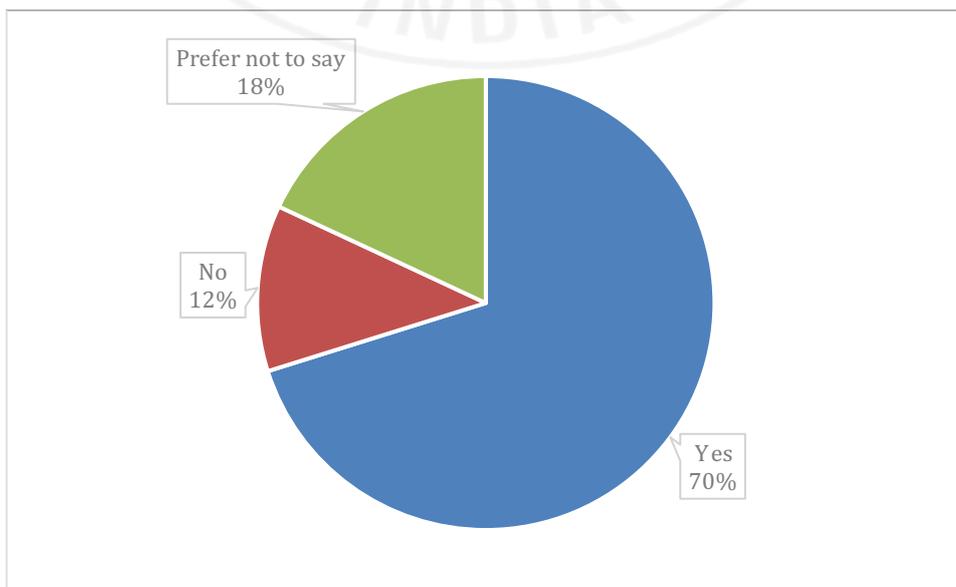
7.9 Returnship Programmes (Question 44)

Amongst 95% respondents who have attempted this question – 73.5 % strongly support the introduction of formal returnship programmes for women lawyers re-entering the profession after career breaks. A further 16.3% described returnship programmes as desirable but optional. Together, 89.8% support their introduction in some form. Only 2.0% said existing systems are sufficient. Only 2.0% said existing systems are sufficient. Only 2.0% said existing systems are sufficient.



7.10 Implementation of Statutory Rights (Question 45)

70.1 % of respondents said they were able to implement their statutory rights as women advocates. 11.8% said they could not. 18.0% preferred not to say. Given the range of statutory rights available (POSH protections, maternity benefits, equal remuneration provisions, professional equality guarantees), it is difficult to ascertain in which of these statutory rights the women lawyers faced difficulty enforcing or implementing the same for themselves. However, the data shows that about 1 in every 10 women faces the said difficulty despite being a legal professional.



CHAPTER 8: LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONS

Survey Section F | Questions 46 to 52

8.1 Equal Opportunity in Bar Leadership (Question 46)

When asked whether women have equal opportunity in Bar leadership positions, only 25.7% of respondents said yes. 42.0% said no, and 22.7% said partly. Together, 64.7% (1,686) do not believe women have equal access to Bar leadership. 9.6% were unsure. It may be noted that during the process of collection and analysis of data a bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court comprising of Hon'ble Mr. Justice Surya Kant, the Chief Justice of India and the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Joyamalya Bagchi have passed catena of orders providing 30 minimum representation for women in Bar Council and Bar Associations across the countries paving the way for guaranteed women participation in Bar leadership.

Response	Percentage
No	42.0%
Partly	22.7%
Yes	25.7%
Unsure	9.6%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 8.1: Equal opportunity in Bar leadership.

8.2 Barriers to Leadership and Judicial Roles (Question 47)

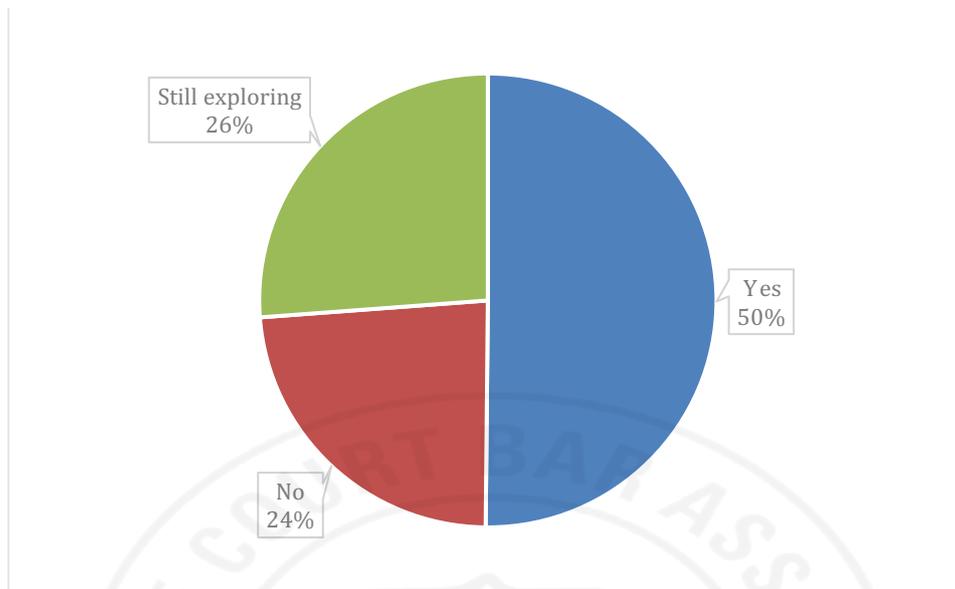
Question 47 was a multi-select question with up to four choices permitted. Analysed by individual barrier frequency:

Barrier	Percentage
Lack of women's networks	65.5%
Financial and time constraints	52.6%
Family role expectations	48.4%
Lack of senior support	40.9%
Lack of guidance	39.4%
Hostile election culture	38.1%
Institutional bias	29.3%
Reputation risks	28.1%
Age or eligibility rules	27.4%
Transfer or posting fears	19.7%
Other	10.29%

Note: Table 8.2: Barriers to leadership and judicial roles (multi-select, up to 4 choices).

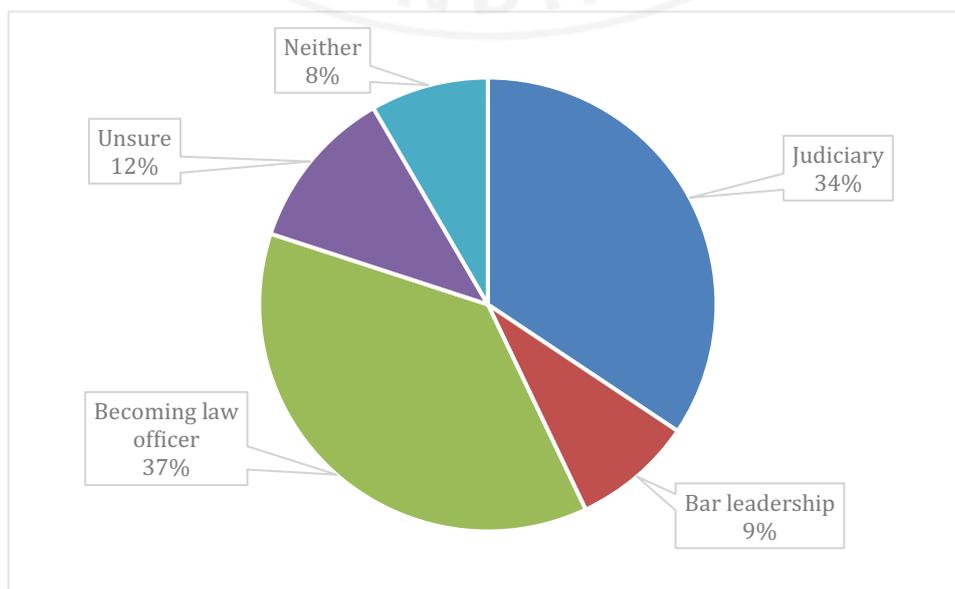
8.3 Transition to Judiciary (Question 48)

50.2% of respondents said they will transition from legal practice to the judiciary as a career choice. 26.2% are still exploring this option. 23.7% said no. Taken together, the majority of the sample either plans to or is considering entering the judiciary, a finding with significant implications for judicial recruitment and appointment policy.



8.4 Future Professional Interests (Question 49)

When asked about future professional trajectories, a plurality of respondents (37%) expressed a preference for roles as Law Officers, including positions such as Attorney General, Solicitor General, and Advocate General. This was followed closely by an inclination towards the judiciary (34.5%). Interest in Bar leadership remained comparatively limited at 8.5%. Notably, 8.3% of respondents indicated no preference for any of these paths, while 11.6% remained uncertain, suggesting a degree of ambivalence or evolving career considerations within the cohort.

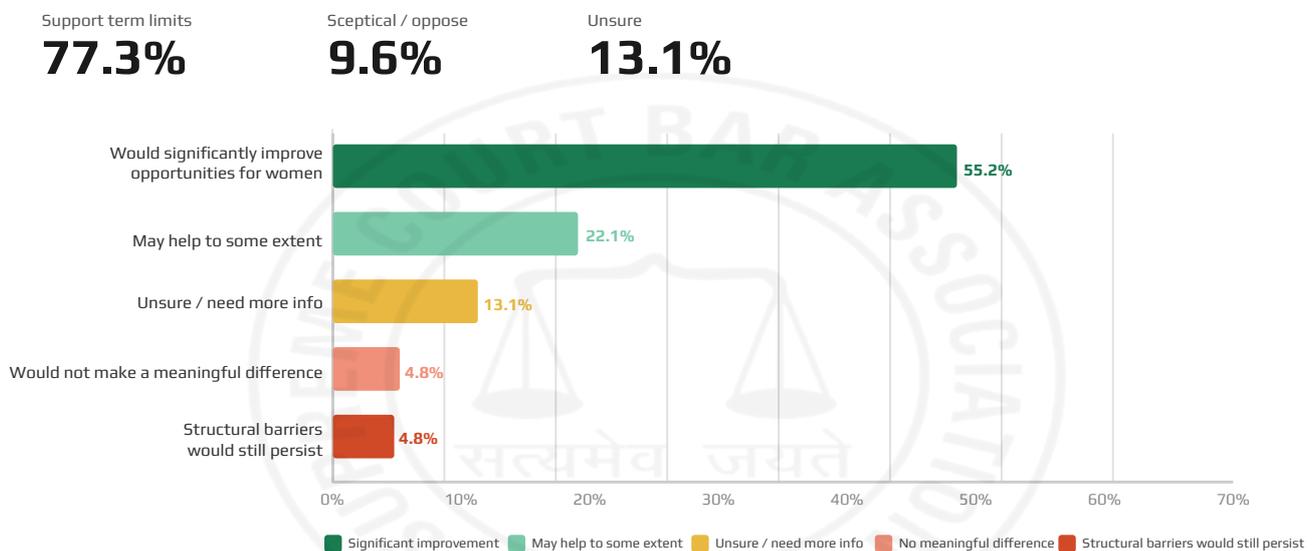


8.5 Roles Being Targeted (Question 50)

Among those considering or planning transitions to other roles, Government empanelment (Central or State) was the most targeted position (491 respondents). This was followed by Ministry of Law and Justice roles (217), other law-related institutional roles (206), Teaching or Academia (81), and in-house legal roles (70).

8.6 Term Limits in Bar Councils/Associations (Question 51)

55.2% of respondents believe that imposing a limit on the number of terms or attempts a person can contest for top leadership positions in Bar Councils or Bar Associations would significantly improve opportunities for women advocates. A further 22.1% believe it may help to some extent. Together, 77.3% support term limits as a structural reform. Only 4.8% believe it would not make a meaningful difference, and 4.8% believe structural barriers would still persist even with term limits. While 13.1% were unsure or asked for more information.



8.7 Interest in Taking Up Bar Leadership (Question 52)

51.9% said they plan to take up leadership in Bar Councils and Bar Associations, while 25.6% are still exploring this option. 21.4% said no, whereas 1.1% did not attempt the question. The appetite for leadership is considerable i.e., 77.5% particularly when viewed alongside the data on barriers: the same women who identify lack of networks, hostile election culture, and institutional bias as barriers also express a desire to lead. The implication is that barriers, if addressed, could unlock substantial leadership potential, which may happen sooner than later owing to the Hon'ble Supreme Court's intervention as mentioned against question no. 46.

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CHAPTER 9: CAREER SATISFACTION AND REFORM PRIORITIES

Survey Section G | Questions 53 to 54

9.1 Overall Career Satisfaction (Question 53)

When asked about their overall career satisfaction as a woman advocate, the single largest group of respondents (35.3%) described themselves as neutral. 31.6% said they are satisfied and 19.3% very satisfied. Together, 50.9% report positive career satisfaction. 11.2% are dissatisfied and 2.6% very dissatisfied, for a combined dissatisfaction rate of 13.8%.

Career Satisfaction	Percentage
Very satisfied	19.3%
Satisfied	31.6%
Neutral	35.3%
Dissatisfied	11.2%
Very dissatisfied	2.6%
Total (valid responses)	100.0%

Note: Table 9.1: Overall career satisfaction.

9.2 Thematic Analysis of Reform Suggestions (Question 54)

Question 54 invited respondents to share, in up to 300 words, what they see as the top three reforms needed to improve the status of women advocates. Of the 2,604 respondents, 2,535 provided substantive responses. A thematic clustering of these responses identified ten dominant reform clusters, presented below in order of frequency.

Theme 1: Equal Access and Equal Opportunity

The most pervasive demand across responses was the elimination of gender-based discrimination in day-to-day professional access. Respondents called for equal briefing opportunities, equal allocation of government work, non-discriminatory chamber practices, and the end of gender-based assumptions about which types of cases women can handle. Many respondents noted that informal discrimination in briefing and work allocation is the primary driver of income inequality in the profession.

Theme 2: Formal Reservation and Representation

A large cluster of responses called for formal reservation or minimum representation in government panels, judicial appointments, Bar Council/Associations executive committees, and senior designations. Respondents framed this not as a compromise of merit but as a correction of a structural bias that has historically operated against women. Many specified numerical targets, with 30 to 33 percent mentioned frequently.

Theme 3: Mentorship and Structured Guidance

Structured, formal mentorship emerged as a priority, particularly among first-generation lawyers. Respondents described the absence of a senior advocate willing to invest time in a junior woman advocate as a decisive early-career disadvantage. Many called for Bar Council-coordinated mentorship schemes that are monitored for quality and actively matched rather than left to individual initiative.

Theme 4: Financial Support in Early Practice

Financial insecurity in the first five years of practice was widely cited. Respondents called for fixed stipends, minimum income guarantees, and equal pay mechanisms. Several noted that financial dependence, especially in a sole practice setting, forces women to accept exploitative arrangements with seniors or to leave the profession entirely.

Theme 5: Maternity Protection and Returnship

Formal maternity leave policy, the right to defer matters without adverse professional consequences, creches within court premises, and structured returnship programmes were among the most specific and concrete demands in this section. Respondents noted the absence of any formal framework for these protections within Bar Councils and courts, despite their statutory nature.

Theme 6: Safe Work Environments and POSH Implementation

Strict and effective implementation of the Prevention, Protection and Redressal of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, 2013 was called for by a significant cluster of respondents. Several noted that Internal Complaints Committees are absent or non-functional in many Bar Council/Associations, and that court premises themselves lack adequate safety infrastructure, including secure waiting areas and safe parking.

Theme 7: Childcare Infrastructure

Creches at court premises, flexible hearing schedules for mothers, and childcare support were cited as reform priorities by a substantial cluster of respondents. The absence of these facilities forces women to choose between appearing in court and caring for young children, with professional consequences that accrue over time into significant career setbacks.

Theme 8: Bar Council and Institutional Reform

Transparency in Bar Council elections, term limits for Bar Association office bearers, gender sensitisation training for senior advocates and judges, and stronger grievance redressal mechanisms were cited as institutional reforms. Several respondents pointed to the closed, male-dominated culture of Bar Association politics as a structural barrier that requires rule-based correction.

Theme 9: Judicial Examination and Appointment Reform

A uniform and transparent judicial service examination syllabus, predictable calendars, support for women candidates (including age and attempt relaxations tied to maternity), and the inclusion of women in interview panels were cited as priorities for those interested in the judiciary.

Theme 10: Women's Networks and Peer Support

State-wide and national women advocates' networks, Bar-sponsored women's associations, and peer support groups were called for by respondents who identified isolation and the absence of collegial support as significant barriers.

9.3 Ranked Reform Priority List

Rank	Reform Theme	Key Demand
1	Equal access and opportunity	End discriminatory briefing and work allocation
2	Representation and reservation	Minimum quotas in panels, courts, and Bar leadership
3	Mentorship	Formal, monitored, Bar-coordinated mentorship schemes
4	Financial support	Stipends and minimum income guarantees in early years
5	Maternity and returnship	Formal maternity policy and structured returnship
6	Safe environments and POSH	Functional ICCs, safe premises, and strict POSH enforcement
7	Childcare infrastructure	Court creches and flexible hearing schedules for mothers
8	Bar institutional reform	Term limits, transparent elections, grievance redressal
9	Judicial exam reform	Uniform syllabus, predictable calendars, support for women
10	Women's networks	Formal women advocates' associations and peer networks

Note: Table 9.3: Ranked reform priority list derived from thematic analysis of 2,535 open-text responses to Question 54.

CHAPTER 10: KEY TAKEAWAYS

The findings of this survey reflect a profession in which structural disparities are identifiable, persistent, and, importantly, capable of being addressed through incremental measures. The points set out below are organised by institutional category and are drawn directly from the empirical patterns emerging from the survey. They are intended to serve as indicative pathways for consideration by Bar Bodies, courts, governments, and professional associations.

10.1 Institutional Reforms for Bar Bodies

10.1.1 Term limits for Bar elections. A significant proportion of respondents (77.3%) expressed support for the introduction of term limits for leadership positions within Bar Bodies. Introducing a norm of limited consecutive terms, such as a maximum of two, may facilitate wider participation and create periodic opportunities for newer entrants, including women advocates, to engage in institutional leadership.

10.1.2 Functional Internal Complaints Committees. Survey responses, particularly in the qualitative inputs, indicate that the presence and effective functioning of Internal Complaints Committees remain uneven. Ensuring that such Committees are constituted and function in alignment with the POSH Act, 2013, alongside periodic review of their functioning, may strengthen confidence in institutional grievance mechanisms. Complementary gender sensitisation initiatives may further support this framework.

10.1.3 Accessible and anonymous grievance redressal. With 59.2% of respondents indicating limited confidence in existing grievance redressal systems, there may be scope for exploring more accessible and, where appropriate, confidential mechanisms. The development of structured grievance platforms with defined timelines and procedural safeguards may contribute to greater trust in institutional processes.

10.1.4 Gender sensitisation programmes. The data suggests value in continued engagement with gender sensitisation efforts across the profession. Structured programmes addressing unconscious bias, professional conduct, and statutory obligations may be considered for members of Bar Bodies, chamber heads, and senior practitioners involved in training junior advocates.

10.2 Court Administrative Reforms

10.2.1 Creches and childcare at court premises. The survey highlights caregiving responsibilities as a significant factor affecting professional participation. The provision of childcare facilities within court premises, where feasible, may support both advocates and court staff, while contributing to a more inclusive working environment.

10.2.2 Flexible hearing scheduling for new mothers. Among respondents who are mothers, 55.2% reported challenges in seeking adjournments following childbirth. The adoption of flexible listing or scheduling practices in such circumstances, through appropriate measures, may help address these constraints.

10.2.3 Safe infrastructure at court premises. Respondents identified concerns relating to safety and accessibility within court premises. Continued investment in infrastructure, such as well-lit spaces, secure access, and adequate facilities, may contribute to improving everyday working conditions.

10.2.4 Gender-disaggregated court data. The absence of systematic gender disaggregated

data emerged as a gap. Periodic publication of such data, relating to appearances, designations, and appointments, may assist in informed institutional reflection and policy development.

10.3 Mentorship Programme Design

10.3.1 Formal coordinated mentorship schemes. The survey indicates an unmet demand for mentorship, with 37.7% of respondents either seeking mentors or reporting unsatisfactory experiences. Structured mentorship initiatives coordinated by Bar Bodies may help bridge this gap through clearer matching processes and defined engagement expectations.

10.3.2 Incentives for mentors. Encouraging active mentorship through institutional recognition, such as linking it with continuing legal education frameworks, may incentivise senior participation. At the same time, maintaining professional standards within mentorship relationships may remain important.

10.3.3 First-generation lawyer support. With 83.1% of respondents identifying as first generation lawyers, there may be a need for targeted support that extends beyond legal training to include orientation to professional networks, court practices, and financial sustainability.

10.4 Gender Equity and Panel Appointment Policies

10.4.1 Mandatory minimum in government panels. A majority of respondents (67.28%) expressed support for greater inclusion of women in government panels. Consideration may be given to evolving frameworks that may encourage broader representation, alongside ensuring meaningful allocation of work.

10.4.2 Transparent empanelment criteria. The survey responses suggest that greater clarity in empanelment criteria and selection processes may enhance perceptions of fairness and accessibility. Transparent procedures may contribute to wider participation.

10.4.3 Minimum reservation for women judges. A substantial proportion of respondents (80.5%) indicated support for increasing the representation of women in the higher judiciary. Continued dialogue and institutional reflection on pathways that may enhance diversity may be beneficial in this regard.

10.5 Maternity and Returnship Support Structures

10.5.1 Formal returnship programmes. With 89.8% of respondents indicating support for structured returnship initiatives, there is a clear indication of the need for reintegration frameworks following career breaks. Such programmes may include mentorship, phased re-entry, and institutional support mechanisms.

10.5.2 Maternity benefit extensions. Given the self-employed nature of legal practice, respondents highlighted gaps in maternity related financial support.

Exploring welfare-based mechanisms within Bar Bodies may help address this concern in a calibrated manner.

10.5.3 Case management protocols during maternity. The survey suggests that predictable case management practices during maternity periods may ease professional pressures. Administrative flexibility, where feasible, may support advocates during this phase without disrupting court functioning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Survey Form

National Survey: Documenting Voices of Women Legal Professionals in India

Conducted by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA)

Note on Confidentiality: The information collected through this questionnaire is solely for the purpose of analysis as part of this survey. Any unauthorised access, disclosure, use, or misuse of the data shall attract penal provisions as per Applicable Law. All questions are optional unless marked with an asterisk (*), which denotes a required question.

SECTION A: BASIC PROFILE & PRACTICE

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q1	Name of the State Bar Council where you are enrolled and the Year of enrolment.
Q2	Total years of legal practice. <input type="checkbox"/> 0 – 5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 10 years <input type="checkbox"/> 10 – 15 years <input type="checkbox"/> More than 15 years
Q3	Your primary place of practice. <input type="checkbox"/> Supreme Court of India <input type="checkbox"/> High Court <input type="checkbox"/> District Courts <input type="checkbox"/> Tribunals <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory – Non-Litigation
Q4	Is your current location the same as your primary place of practice, or have you relocated? If relocated, what was the main reason? <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage <input type="checkbox"/> Better professional opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse/partner's job transfer <input type="checkbox"/> Family responsibilities <input type="checkbox"/> Higher education / specialisation <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Q5	Your current practice set-up. <input type="checkbox"/> Independent (sole practitioner) <input type="checkbox"/> Working as a junior in a Chamber <input type="checkbox"/> Working in boutique firm (5–10 lawyers) <input type="checkbox"/> Medium/large law firm (10–20 lawyers) <input type="checkbox"/> Very large law firm (20+ lawyers) <input type="checkbox"/> In-house / Corporate counsel <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Q6	Your current professional position(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Designated Senior Advocate: Supreme Court <input type="checkbox"/> Designated Senior Advocate: High Court

	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocate-on-Record: Supreme Court <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate <input type="checkbox"/> Working at a Law Firm
Q7	<p>In your view, how does the ease of designation as a Senior Advocate compare between men and women?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Easier for men <input type="checkbox"/> Easier for women <input type="checkbox"/> Same for both <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot say
Q8	<p>Have you served in any of the following positions?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Attorney General for India <input type="checkbox"/> Solicitor General <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate General <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Solicitor General (Supreme Court) <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Solicitor General (High Court) <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Additional Advocate General <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Advocate General <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Advocate General <input type="checkbox"/> Panel Counsel <input type="checkbox"/> Standing Counsel <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above
Q9	<p>If you are/were holding any position as in Q8, how frequently were you allotted work?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly and consistently <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Almost never <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
Q10	<p>Do you think a minimum reservation or representation of women lawyers should be mandated in panels (e.g., NALSA / State & District Legal Services Authorities)?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – mandatory minimum representation is necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – representation should be encouraged through guidelines, not reservation <input type="checkbox"/> No – selection should be entirely merit-based <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / need more deliberation
Q11	<p>Do you think governments should adopt a mandatory policy to ensure adequate representation of women advocates as panel counsel and law officers, including allocation of government work?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – mandatory minimum representation and case allocation are necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – minimum representation is necessary, but case allocation should remain flexible <input type="checkbox"/> No – representation should be encouraged but not made mandatory <input type="checkbox"/> No – appointments and allocation should be entirely merit-based without quotas <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / need more deliberation
Q12	<p>In your view, are government/authority panel appointments easier for men compared to women?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, easier for men <input type="checkbox"/> Easier for women <input type="checkbox"/> There should be minimum representation of women advocates on government panels <input type="checkbox"/> Mentorship or briefing support for newly empanelled women advocates

	<input type="checkbox"/> Same for both <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot say
Q13	Your main area(s) of practice. <input type="checkbox"/> Civil <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal <input type="checkbox"/> Constitutional / Writs <input type="checkbox"/> Service / Labour <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial / Company / Insolvency <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Dispute Resolution <input type="checkbox"/> Family / Matrimonial <input type="checkbox"/> Property / Real Estate <input type="checkbox"/> Taxation <input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual Property <input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights / PIL <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer <input type="checkbox"/> Cyber / Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Q14	Do you think your area of specialisation has, at any point, affected your access to certain professional opportunities due to gender-based expectations? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
Q15	Are you a first-generation lawyer (no immediate family member in the legal profession)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

SECTION B: OFFICE, INFRASTRUCTURE & TECHNOLOGY

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q16	Where is your primary office located? <input type="checkbox"/> Walkable distance from court <input type="checkbox"/> Within 5–10 km <input type="checkbox"/> More than 10 km (same city) <input type="checkbox"/> Different city <input type="checkbox"/> Mainly work from home <input type="checkbox"/> No dedicated office <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Q17	Does having an office or Chamber near the court help/will help your practice? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, significantly <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, to some extent <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
Q18	If you do NOT have an office/Chamber near court, the main reason(s): (Select up to 3) <input type="checkbox"/> High rent/cost

- Commute by public transport/safety concerns
- No shared spaces available
- Family responsibilities
- Home office is more convenient for work-life balance
- Using senior's chamber
- Not financially viable yet
- Not required – everything is online
- Early stage of practice
- Any other reason

Q19 Do you have access to the following professional resources?

- Physical law library
- Paid legal databases
- Free online platforms
- Research assistance
- Clerical/secretarial staff
- Stable internet & devices
- Case-management software
- None of the above

Q20 Have you experienced or witnessed any law office, chamber, Court/Registry or Police Station within your area of practice that discourages women lawyers?

- Yes – I have personally experienced/witnessed this
- Yes – I am aware of such practices through colleagues
- No – I have not come across such practices
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Q21 In which context(s) did you face gender bias?

- Training / Internships
- Seniors (Chamber Heads / Employers)
- Judges / Courtroom interactions
- Opposing Counsel
- Colleagues / Peers
- Court Staff
- Office / Clerical Staff / Police Staff
- Clients (including trust and briefing)
- Panel appointments / Designation processes
- Allocation of important/high-profile/sensitive matters
- Fees, payments, or fee negotiations
- Access to mentorship and professional guidance
- Informal professional networks (briefing, networking, referrals)
- Media interactions or representation
- Work-life balance expectations imposed due to gender
- Other

Q22 Impact of technology (e-courts, virtual hearings) on your work.

- Very positive
- Somewhat positive
- Mixed
- Mostly negative
- No impact
- Not applicable

SECTION C: EXPERIENCE, COMPARISON & BIAS

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q23	<p>Overall, how would you describe your experience as a Woman Advocate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Very encouraging <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes encouraging, sometimes discouraging <input type="checkbox"/> Discouraging <input type="checkbox"/> Very discouraging
Q24	<p>Compared to male counterparts, your professional journey has been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Much more difficult <input type="checkbox"/> Slightly more difficult <input type="checkbox"/> About the same <input type="checkbox"/> Easier <input type="checkbox"/> Much easier <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot say
Q25	<p>Have you ever faced sexual harassment in any professional setting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Q26	<p>After reporting or seeking any remedy, did you experience any form of backlash or adverse consequences? (Select all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – from professional peers/colleagues/Seniors/judiciary/Police/Clients <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – from family members or close relatives <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – loss of work opportunities or professional exclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – subtle retaliation (hostile environment, sidelining, negative remarks) <input type="checkbox"/> No – did not face any backlash <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (did not report or seek remedy)
Q27	<p>Have you also come across instances where women lawyers themselves discourage or resist the hiring of other women lawyers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – I have personally witnessed such instances <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – I am aware of such instances through colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> No – I have not come across such instances <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / cannot say <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Q28	<p>Do you think your gender hinders your ability to network for professional growth (e.g., travelling alone at night, staying overnight for work)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, significantly <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, to some extent <input type="checkbox"/> No, not at all <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / no opinion

SECTION D: CHALLENGES, MENTORSHIP & WELL-BEING

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q29	<p>What are the major challenges you currently face?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of mentorship<input type="checkbox"/> Limited work opportunities<input type="checkbox"/> Poor research access<input type="checkbox"/> Absence of drafting training<input type="checkbox"/> Absence of advocacy training<input type="checkbox"/> Networking difficulties<input type="checkbox"/> Family expectations<input type="checkbox"/> Work-life imbalance<input type="checkbox"/> Harassment<input type="checkbox"/> Pay inequality<input type="checkbox"/> Mental health strain<input type="checkbox"/> Safety concerns<input type="checkbox"/> Childcare burden<input type="checkbox"/> No maternity support<input type="checkbox"/> Gendered behaviour norms<input type="checkbox"/> Other
Q30	<p>Do you have a mentor, and are you satisfied with the quality of mentorship?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, formal mentor and very satisfied with quality<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, formal mentor and not satisfied with quality<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, informal mentor and very satisfied with quality<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, informal mentor and not satisfied with quality<input type="checkbox"/> No, but seeking one<input type="checkbox"/> No, not seeking
Q31	<p>How confident are you that a complaint about discrimination or harassment would be handled fairly if you raised it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Very confident<input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat confident<input type="checkbox"/> Not very confident<input type="checkbox"/> Not at all confident<input type="checkbox"/> It depends on the person or forum
Q32	<p>How often have you experienced work-related stress or burnout in the last 12 months?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Very often<input type="checkbox"/> Often<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes<input type="checkbox"/> Rarely<input type="checkbox"/> Never
(<p>Do you have any suggestions to improve the conduct and inclusivity of State Judicial Service Examinations (Higher Judiciary and Supreme Court)? (Select all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Transparent and uniform examination syllabus and pattern across states<input type="checkbox"/> Predictable examination calendars and timely notifications<input type="checkbox"/> Adequate representation of women in interview boards<input type="checkbox"/> Support measures for women candidates (maternity-related relaxations, age/attempts, exam scheduling)<input type="checkbox"/> Clear and timely grievance redressal mechanism<input type="checkbox"/> No suggestions / satisfied with existing process

	<input type="checkbox"/> Any other suggestion
Q34	<p>Do you think a minimum percentage of seats for women judges should be ensured in High Courts and the Supreme Court?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – a uniform minimum percentage across all High Courts (e.g., 20%) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes – percentage should vary based on the sex ratio of the concerned State(s) <input type="checkbox"/> No – appointments should be without any reservation <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / requires further constitutional deliberation

SECTION E: MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD, CARE, WORK AND FAMILY

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q35	<p>Your current family status.</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Single <input type="checkbox"/> Married – no children <input type="checkbox"/> Married – with children <input type="checkbox"/> Single mother <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced/Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
Q36	<p>Has marital status affected your professional work?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Minor hardships <input type="checkbox"/> Major hardships <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable
Q37	<p>If yes to Q36, what type of hardships have you faced? (Select up to 3)</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Being single/unmarried <input type="checkbox"/> Primary caregiving role <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced travel for work <input type="checkbox"/> Household pressure <input type="checkbox"/> In-law/family pressure <input type="checkbox"/> Change of city <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty with late-night work <input type="checkbox"/> Financial instability <input type="checkbox"/> Health issues <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health <input type="checkbox"/> Work-life balance <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of senior support <input type="checkbox"/> Insensitive remarks <input type="checkbox"/> Physical exhaustion <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Q38	<p>Did you get support when you asked for accommodation due to responsibilities of childcare or family care?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable

Q39	<p>Did you face difficulties in getting your matters deferred when you had your child?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p>
Q40	<p>Do family responsibilities, including parenting, influence your professional growth or require you to balance multiple roles?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – having children has positively supported my career</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – it has required significant role-balancing at home and work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – it limits your professional opportunities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No – it has not significantly affected my career</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable (no children)</p>
Q41	<p>If given a choice, which professional path would you prefer for your daughter or son within the legal field?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Joining my office/chamber for legal practice</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Independent legal practice outside my chamber</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Judiciary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Government department or statutory body related to law</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Teaching / academia / corporate lawyer</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No specific preference – child's choice should prevail</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p>
Q42	<p>Do you think your choice would vary if it was a daughter instead of a son?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, significantly</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, to some extent</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, choice would be the same</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable</p>
Q43	<p>If you were guiding your daughter or a close female family member, which career path in Law would you prefer?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Litigation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Judiciary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Corporate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Academics</p>
Q44	<p>Do you think formal 'Returnship Programmes' should be introduced to help women lawyers re-enter the legal profession after career breaks?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – strongly required</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – desirable but optional</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No – existing systems are sufficient</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / need more discussion</p>
Q45	<p>Being a lady Advocate, could you implement your statutory rights?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say</p>

SECTION F: LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONS

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q46	<p>Do women have equal opportunity in Bar leadership positions?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Partly</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
Q47	<p>Main barriers to leadership and judicial roles for women. (Select up to 4)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of women network groups vis-à-vis their counterparts</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of senior support</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family role expectations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hostile election culture</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of guidance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Financial/time constraints</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Age/eligibility rules</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transfer/posting fears</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reputation risks</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Institutional bias</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>
Q48	<p>Do you think you will transition from legal practice to judiciary as a career choice?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Still exploring</p>
Q49	<p>Your future professional interest.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bar leadership</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Judiciary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming a law officer (Solicitor General, Attorney General, Advocate General, etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Neither</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsure</p>
Q50	<p>If yes or considering transition, which of the following roles are you aiming for or have moved into?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Government empanelment (Central/State)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Teaching / Academia (Law colleges or universities)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Tribunal roles (e.g., NCLAT, NGT, CAT, etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Ministry of Law & Justice</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Constitutional / Statutory Bodies (e.g., NHRC, Commissions)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In-house legal roles</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other law-related institutional roles</p>
Q51	<p>Do you think imposing a limit on the number of terms/attempts a person can contest for top Bar leadership positions would encourage greater participation of women advocates?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – it would significantly improve opportunities for women advocates</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes – it may help to some extent</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No – it would not make a meaningful difference</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No – structural barriers would still persist</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not sure / need more information</p>

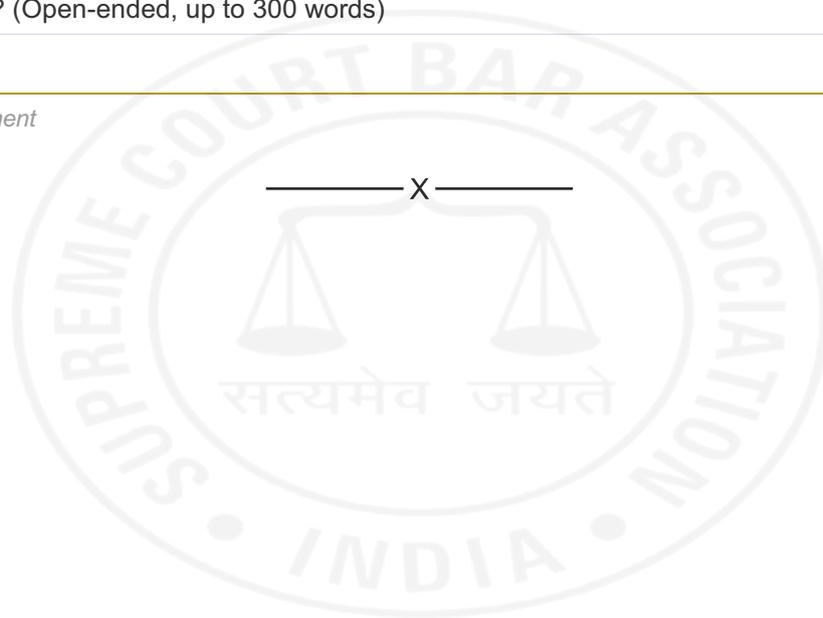
Q52 Do you think you will take up leadership in Bar Councils and Bar Associations?

- Yes
- No
- Still exploring

SECTION G: CAREER SATISFACTION & REFORM

Q No.	Question and Response Options
Q53	Your overall career satisfaction as a woman advocate. <input type="checkbox"/> Very satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Satisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Neutral <input type="checkbox"/> Dissatisfied <input type="checkbox"/> Very dissatisfied
Q54	In your view, what are the top 3 reforms needed to improve the status of women advocates? (Open-ended, up to 300 words)

End of Survey Instrument



APPENDIX II: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PILOT SURVEY - DOCUMENTING VOICES OF WOMEN ADVOCATES OF DELHI NCR CONDUCTED BY SCBA ON 3RD DECEMBER, 2025

The results are startling, especially as we mark one hundred years since the passage of the Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, 1923, which granted women the right to practise law in India. We draw inspiration from the courage and persistence of Regina Guha, Sudhansu Bala Hazra, Cornelia Sorabji and numerous other women who even today continues to challenge the boundaries paving way for generations of women advocates.

The survey brings together the lived experience of 301 women advocates practising across the Supreme Court, High Courts, District Courts, Tribunals and Quasi-Judicial forums. This gives us a rich and representative understanding of women's professional journeys in Delhi NCR.

Questionnaire and Sample Space

We begin with the questionnaire that was shared with the respondents. It captures significant aspects of women advocates' professional lives. It includes their background, first generation status, professional experience, leadership opportunities, challenges, impact of marriage and motherhood, support systems and career preferences for the next generation. Together this framework helped us gather a holistic picture of the realities women encounter. We received an overwhelming response from 301 women advocates across Delhi NCR, which strengthens the reliability of the findings.

First Generation Lawyers and Professional Experience

(Question 4) - The first major insight comes from the question on first generation status. The data shows that 84.1 percent of respondents are first generation lawyers and only 15.9 percent come from legal families.

(Question 5) - This indicates a strong and rising trend of women entering law without family networks and building their journeys independently.

When asked about their experience as women advocates, the responses show a mixed landscape.

- 38.5 percent described their experience as sometime encouraging and sometime discouraging, which means they have felt discouraging at some point of time.
- 25.2 percent felt it was discouraging.
- 17.4 percent found it encouraging.
- 11.3 percent found it very encouraging.

The total discouraging response (including partially and totally) takes it to about 68 %. This shows that while many women are progressing, a large number continue to deal with structural and cultural hurdles. Only about

(Question 6) -on equal opportunity in leadership roles in Bar.

Another important finding relates to leadership roles in the Bar. 57.8 percent believe that women do not have equal opportunities in Bar leadership. Only 42.2 percent feel opportunities are equal.

However, despite this perception of unequal access in (Question 7) , 58.9 percent respondents say they are willing to take up leadership roles in Bar Councils and Bar Associations, while 30.4% are still exploring, which makes it 89.3% and only 10.7% have rejected the idea out straight This shows strong aspiration and readiness among women to step into leadership, even when institutional structures appear unfriendly.

Challenges in the Profession

The corresponding bar chart outlines the main challenges faced by women advocates. Work life balance emerges (34.2%) as the most severe concern, followed by limited job opportunities at (16.4%), lack of pay parity (14%), inadequate mentorship (13.7%). Other challenges include unrealistic expectations (9.6%), gaps in training for court craft and drafting - (3.5%), mental health concerns (2.1%) and workplace sexual harassment.

These findings reveal that gender issues in the legal profession are not limited to isolated experiences but are part of a wider ecosystem of structural challenges.

Transition to Judiciary and Gender Bias

(Question 8) -Turning to career preferences, it shows a significant inclination towards the judiciary.

- 43.1 percent want to transition to the judiciary.
- 31.2 percent do not wish to.
- 25.8 percent are still exploring.

This indicates a strong aspiration to move into the Bench exist amongst women. The gender bias chart reveals that 33.1 percent have experienced gender bias and 29.1 percent report occasional bias. Only 23.1 percent say they have not experienced bias and around 76.9% makes up of the women who either say yes, frequently, occasionally or prefer not speaking about it. This confirms that gender bias, both explicit and implicit, continues to affect many women.

Marriage, Motherhood and Professional Support

Marriage and motherhood significantly shape women's professional realities.

- 38.2 percent faced hardship after marriage. **(Question - 11)**
- 66.5 percent faced hardship when they decided to have a child. **(Question -12)**
- 68.7 percent had difficulty getting matters deferred when they had a child. **(Question - 13)**

(Question 14) shows that the Support systems are inadequate. Only 52.4 percent received support when they asked for accommodation due to childcare or family responsibilities. **Question 15** shows that at the same time an overwhelming 95.4 percent believe that institutional policies such as maternity leave, creche facilities, workplace safety and flexible hours would greatly improve their professional journey.

These data read with hardship faced in work-life balance, makes it evident that legal profession has to evolve as inclusive profession which might require structural changes to acknowledge the difficulties.

Career Preferences for Daughters and Family Members

Question 16 : shows encouraging trends. 64.1 percent of respondents would recommend law as a career to their daughter or a girl in their close family and about 20.7% said may be, whereas only about 15.3% said NO.

Question 17 -When asked about preferred streams, 39.6 percent recommend judiciary, followed by litigation at 36.1 percent. Corporate and academics follow thereafter. This shows the growing prestige and stability associated with judicial careers but also about the fact that women are looking forward to job-security and institutional benefits, which otherwise are absent from litigation such as maternity benefits.

Gender Bias Across Generations

Gender bias is cross tabulated with first generation status. First generation women report higher levels of bias compared to second generation women. This shows that women without family networks often face additional invisibility, scrutiny and barriers.

Consolidated View on Marriage and Motherhood

Collation of three major indicators. It gives a clear picture that marriage and motherhood continue to impose disproportionate burdens on women advocates and that the absence of formal support systems intensifies these pressures along with the fact that women are primary care givers.

Career Guidance Based on Generation

It compares how first generation and second-generation lawyers guide the next generation on career paths. Both groups most frequently recommend the judiciary. Among first generation lawyers, recommendations are almost evenly split between litigation and judiciary, with a smaller but visible tilt toward corporate roles and the least towards academics. Among second generation lawyers, there is a stronger tilt toward the judiciary, relatively lower preference for litigation, higher interest in academics and a lower inclination toward corporate roles. This shows that while both groups value the Bench, first generation respondents keep litigation and corporate strongly in view, whereas second generation respondents are more inclined toward judiciary and academic paths.

Career Guidance Based on Years of Practice

On being asked which career path they would guide a woman in their family to pursue, a clear generational pattern emerged. Younger advocates, with less than ten years of practice, showed a strong preference for the judiciary and academics. This is likely because these paths offer greater job security, institutional benefits and a sense of stability. In contrast, women with more than ten years of experience were more inclined to recommend litigation and corporate practice. Their choices reflect the confidence, networks and professional grounding they have built over the years in active practice. This suggests two findings. First, the younger generation is increasingly drawn towards judicial careers, possibly with an eye on the district judiciary. Second, experienced women advocates prefer practice-oriented careers, reflecting their familiarity with court craft, client work and the broader opportunities that come with seniority in the legal profession.

Conclusion

The survey presents a landscape that is honest, layered and forward looking. It reveals both progress and persistent inequalities. It highlights strong ambition among women advocates, shifting career preferences across generations, and the clear need for supportive institutional policies. Above all, it reflects the resilience and determination of women who continue to shape and strengthen the legal profession every day.

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