

Teaching the Law, Weathering the Storm: Faculty Burnout and Mental Health in Indian Jurisprudential Education.

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Abstract: Although there is a lot of discussion on student wellness, the psychological well-being of Indian law professors is still a "silent sidebar." This study examines the growing problem of teacher burnout in the particular context of Indian legal education, which is marked by significant administrative workloads, the "publish or perish" requirement of UGC regulations, and the emotional labour of mentoring in demanding settings. The paper demonstrates how chronic stress jeopardises both the long-term viability of legal academia and the quality of jurisprudential instruction by examining the junction of traditional pedagogical expectations and contemporary institutional demands. The study makes the case for a structural paradigm change by identifying systemic pressures through a qualitative lens, such as accreditation-driven bureaucracy and the digital "always-on" mentality. In order to protect the builders of the legal profession, the paper's conclusion suggests a thorough "Wellness Protocol" for Indian law schools and advocates for institutionalised mental health care and policy changes by the Bar Council of India.

Keywords: Legal Education, Faculty Burnout, India, Mental Health, Jurisprudence, Pedagogy, UGC, Institutional Reform.

INTRODUCTION

The law teacher is frequently seen in the broader scheme of the Indian legal system as a stoic pillar and an unflinching source of jurisprudential knowledge entrusted with shaping the next generation of judges, advocates, and legislators. But a hidden crisis is simmering underneath the formal structure of the Indian classroom and the traditional black robes. The mental health of educators themselves is still a "silent sidebar" in the discussion, despite the fact that recent scholarly discourse has appropriately started to confront the growing rates of anxiety and depression among law students.

This study's title, "Teaching the Law, Weathering the Storm," captures a dual reality: the emotional upheaval of navigating a workplace increasingly marked by systemic burnout and the intellectual rigour of teaching legal theory.

The Evolution of the Role of Indian Law Faculty

In the past, the "Sages on Stages" concept established the function of a law professor in India as a highly esteemed post with an emphasis on scholarship and speaking. But over the past 20 years, there has been a significant change. A high-pressure, goal-oriented culture has been fostered by the growth of National Law Universities (NLUs) and the corporatisation of private legal education. Indian law professors now serve as administrators, placement coordinators, moot court coaches, and researchers in addition to being instructors.

In this study, "storm" refers to a cumulative atmospheric pressure rather than a single occurrence. It is the outcome of a special meeting point between contemporary institutional demands and conventional instructional expectations. This is made more difficult in India by the regulatory oversight of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Bar Council of India (BCI), whose strict frameworks frequently give priority to quantitative metrics like hours worked and papers published over the qualitative well-being of the people behind the lectern.

The Anatomy of Burnout in the Indian Context

There is more to burnout than just "tiredness." According to the World Health Organization, it is a syndrome brought on by unmanaged persistent working stress. Four main "stress-multipliers" are responsible for this burnout in Indian legal academia:

Administrative Overload:Non-academic responsibilities often burden Indian law professors. The "administrative tail" is frequently wagging the "academic dog," from handling NAAC accreditation paperwork to overseeing never-ending cycles of internal exams. They have a sense of professional dissonance and futility as a result of this shift in focus from their main love, the law.

The "Publish or Perish" Mandate:The UGC's Career Advancement Scheme (CAS), along with competitive ranking frameworks such as NIRF, has increasingly reduced research to a race driven by numbers and measurable outputs. In this environment, faculty members are often expected to generate high-quality research while managing heavy teaching loads of 18 to 22 hours per week. This constant pressure frequently results in mental fatigue and sustained cognitive strain.

The Emotional Burden of Mentorship:Law students in India often experience intense pressure related to placements and competitive examinations such as the Judicial Services and

CLAT PG. In this context, faculty members frequently find themselves absorbing students' stress and anxieties, informally stepping into the role of counselors despite lacking formal training or institutional support. Over time, this continuous emotional engagement can lead to "compassion fatigue," an important yet largely overlooked dimension of faculty burnout.

The Digital Intrusion into Academic Life: In the post-pandemic landscape, the boundaries between personal and professional spaces have become increasingly blurred. Constant communication through WhatsApp groups and late-night administrative emails has fostered an "always-on" culture. For law teachers, this persistent digital engagement disrupts the mental space necessary for deep academic reflection, as moments of focused thinking are repeatedly interrupted by the urgency of digital notifications.

Importance of Research: The neglect of mental health among law faculty is not merely a humanitarian concern; it poses a serious risk to the integrity and future of the legal profession. Educators experiencing burnout are less able to nurture critical thinking or inspire a genuine commitment to justice. When those responsible for shaping legal minds operate under sustained stress, the quality of jurisprudential teaching is inevitably compromised. This, in turn, risks producing graduates who perceive law as a rigid set of rules rather than a dynamic tool for social transformation.

Additionally, the stigma surrounding mental health in India particularly within a profession that values toughness and resilience, discourages faculty from seeking support. Legal culture often equates vulnerability with weakness, leading many educators to endure significant psychological strain in silence rather than acknowledge their struggles.

This research aims to shift the focus from individual resilience to institutional responsibility. By examining the structural and systemic causes of faculty burnout in Indian law schools, it calls for a fundamental rethinking of how academic environments are designed and supported. The study advocates for recognizing the mental wellbeing of educators as essential to academic excellence, rather than treating it as an optional concern.

Through this analysis, the paper proposes a "Wellness Protocol" that envisions a more sustainable, supportive, and intellectually enriching ecosystem for legal education in India.

The Jurisprudential Impact: Erosion of Legal Reasoning

The connection between the mental wellbeing of law faculty and the quality of jurisprudential teaching is not incidental but deeply interdependent. Jurisprudence forms the intellectual foundation of legal education, demanding reflection, critical engagement, and the capacity to question established norms. However, when faculty operate under conditions of chronic burnout, the depth and quality of this engagement begin to decline. As a result, the teaching of law risks losing its dynamic character as an instrument of social transformation.

• From Critical Inquiry to Mechanical Legalism

Burnout often leads to mental fatigue, which weakens higher-order cognitive functions such as analysis, reflection, and reasoning. In the classroom, this manifests as a gradual shift from critical engagement with legal ideas to a more mechanical and surface-level approach to teaching.

• Loss of Conceptual Depth: Faculty experiencing burnout may focus primarily on explaining what the law states statutory provisions, case citations, and procedural rules while giving less attention to why the law exists. Engaging with deeper philosophical frameworks, such as Rawls' theory of justice, Dworkin's concept of "law as integrity," or Ambedkar's vision of constitutional morality, requires sustained intellectual energy that burnout often diminishes.

• Reinforcement of Rote Learning: To cope with cognitive strain, educators may increasingly rely on pre-prepared notes or exam-oriented teaching methods. This encourages students to prioritize memorization over critical thinking, reducing legal education to a tool for clearing examinations rather than understanding justice and fairness.

• Superficial Engagement with Case Law: Another consequence is the reduced depth in teaching case law. Instead of analysing the ratio decidendi and its broader implications, instruction may be limited to summarizing facts and outcomes. This not only weakens students' analytical abilities but also diminishes their capacity to engage meaningfully with legal reasoning.

The Decline of Socratic Engagement

A defining feature of high-quality legal education both in India and globally is the Socratic method, which relies on dialogue, critical questioning, and intellectual agility. It requires the

teacher to actively engage with students' arguments, identify inconsistencies, and guide them through reasoned debate. However, this method is particularly vulnerable to the effects of faculty burnout.

- **Emotional Disengagement:** Burnout often leads to depersonalization, reducing a teacher's willingness to engage in intellectually demanding classroom discussions. Instead of facilitating dialogue, educators may gravitate toward one-way lectures to conserve cognitive and emotional energy.

- **Suppression of Critical Voices** Effective legal education depends on dissent and creative reasoning. Yet, a fatigued mind tends to prefer certainty and closure. As a result, faculty may unintentionally discourage unconventional or critical perspectives, limiting students' ability to explore complex constitutional interpretations.

Impact on Student Mentorship: The "Vulnerability Gap"

In the Indian context, law teachers traditionally play the role of mentors, guiding students not only academically but also ethically and professionally. Burnout, however, creates a significant gap in this mentorship process.

- **Decline in Mentorship Quality:** Meaningful mentorship requires emotional investment and availability. When faculty are overwhelmed, they may struggle to provide the empathy and guidance students need, particularly in high-pressure situations such as moot courts or clinical legal work.

- **Transmission of Anxiety:** Faculty burnout can subtly influence students' perceptions of the legal profession. When students observe their mentors operating under constant stress, they may internalize the belief that success in law inevitably comes at the cost of personal wellbeing.

- **Gradual Ethical Dilution:** Professional ethics are often learned through observation. If burnout leads faculty to compromise on preparation, feedback, or engagement, it may signal to students that such compromises are acceptable. Over time, this can weaken the ethical foundations of future legal professionals.

The “Research Teaching” Paradox in India

Legal academics in India are increasingly expected to balance intensive teaching responsibilities with a strong demand for research output, particularly under UGC norms. However, sustained burnout significantly undermines the ability to produce meaningful and original scholarship, creating a tension between quantity and quality in academic work.

- **Rise of Derivative Scholarship:** When faculty operate under constant pressure and fatigue, there is a tendency to rely on academic shortcuts. This often results in research that is descriptive rather than analytical, with limited original contribution and, in some cases, concerns around plagiarism. The emphasis shifts from generating new jurisprudential insights to merely reproducing existing knowledge.

- **Decline of the Public Intellectual Role:** Traditionally, law academics in India have played a vital role as public intellectuals, contributing to debates on constitutional and social issues. However, burnout can push faculty into a mode of professional survival, reducing their engagement with public discourse. This withdrawal creates a gap in informed legal commentary, weakening the broader intellectual contribution of academia to society.

Mental Health Crises and Institutional Responses in Indian NLUs

The issue of mental health within National Law Universities (NLUs) has moved from being an under-discussed campus concern to one that has attracted national attention, including judicial scrutiny. The “islands of excellence” model marked by intense competition, demanding academic schedules, and a culture of constant performance has increasingly come under criticism, particularly in light of several high-profile student tragedies.

These developments have prompted a broader re-evaluation of institutional practices and student support systems within NLUs. As a result, mental health is no longer viewed as a peripheral issue but as a central concern requiring structural and policy-level interventions. The following case studies and institutional responses illustrate the evolving landscape of mental health awareness and reform within Indian legal education.

1. NLU Delhi: The “Three Suicides” Crisis (2024)

In September 2024, NLU Delhi witnessed the tragic loss of three students within a span of one month. This series of incidents became a turning point, triggering a wider national discussion on the intense pressures associated with elite law schools.

- **Context:** One of the students, AmrutavarshinySenthil Kumar, had been actively raising concerns about issues such as sexual harassment and caste-based discrimination on campus. Her death brought attention to deeper institutional challenges, particularly regarding the experiences of whistleblowers and students from marginalized backgrounds.

- **Institutional Response:** The university initially faced criticism for its perceived lack of sensitivity in handling the situation. However, it later introduced a comprehensive Mental Health Policy in 2025 aimed at strengthening student support systems.

A notable feature of this policy was the establishment of an “**Academic Wellness Sub-Group.**” This body acts as a formal link between mental health support mechanisms and academic administration, ensuring that academic structures and schedules are reviewed in light of their potential psychological impact on students.

2. NLSIU Bangalore: Internal Mental Health Review (2019–2024)

As one of India’s leading law schools, NLSIU Bangalore has been central to conversations around mental health in legal education. An internal report commissioned by the Student Bar Association (SBA) in 2019 described mental health as a significantly under-addressed issue on campus.

- **Key Findings:** The report pointed to a concerning pattern of academic setbacks, including repeated year-losses, which disproportionately affected students from marginalized backgrounds. In the 2019 batch, a substantial number of students were unable to continue their academic progression due to factors such as dropout, prolonged academic delays, and, in some cases, severe mental health crises. These findings highlighted systemic pressures within the academic environment.

- **Institutional Response:** In response, NLSIU introduced the **Workplace Emotional Wellbeing Programme (2024)**, marking a more holistic approach to mental health. Notably, the programme extends support not only to students but also to faculty and staff,

acknowledging the interconnected nature of wellbeing within academic institutions. The university also collaborated with external mental health service providers, such as Amaha, to offer confidential and accessible counselling services in multiple languages.

3. GNLU and NALSAR: Rethinking Institutional Rigor

Both Gujarat National Law University (GNLU) and NALSAR have, in recent years, faced incidents that prompted closer scrutiny of institutional structures and accountability, particularly in relation to student wellbeing.

- **GNLU Context (2024–2025):** Following instances of student suicides, concerns were raised about gaps in immediate medical and psychological support systems. While counselling services were formally available, students highlighted that the broader institutional culture often continued to associate seeking help with weakness. This pointed to a deeper need for cultural as well as structural reform within academic environments.

- **NALSAR's Inclusive Approach:** NALSAR has taken steps to address the intersection of mental health with social factors such as caste and language. Recognizing that conventional counselling models may not be accessible to all students, the institution has encouraged peer-support systems and sensitization initiatives. Particular attention has been given to addressing subtle forms of exclusion faced by students from rural or non-English medium backgrounds.

4. Judicial Intervention: *SukdebSaha v. State of Andhra Pradesh*(2025)

A significant development in this area has been judicial intervention by the Supreme Court, which acknowledged the seriousness of student mental health concerns in higher education institutions. The Court affirmed that the right to mental health forms an integral part of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution, thereby elevating mental wellbeing to a constitutionally protected interest.

- **Directions Issued:** The Court laid down a set of mandatory guidelines for higher education institutions, aimed at strengthening support systems and preventive measures. These included:

- Establishment of structured counselling mechanisms involving students, faculty, and where appropriate, parents.
- Flexibility in academic requirements, such as attendance norms, in cases involving documented mental health concerns.

- Creation of a centralized data system to track student mental health trends and enable evidence-based interventions.

Regulatory and Judicial Framework Governing Mental Health in Legal Education

1. Bar Council of India (BCI) Rules, 2008

The *Rules on Standards of Legal Education and Recognition of Degrees* (Part IV of the BCI Rules, 2008) form the primary regulatory framework governing legal education in India. While these rules focus largely on academic standards, they also provide an important basis for analysing faculty workload and institutional responsibility.

- **Rule 14: Teacher–Student Ratio:** This rule prescribes an ideal ratio of 1:40 to ensure quality legal education. However, in practice, this standard is frequently exceeded, leading to excessive teaching loads. Such deviations significantly contribute to faculty burnout and compromise both teaching quality and academic engagement.
- **Rule 16: Faculty Requirements:** The rule mandates a minimum number of full-time faculty members for law institutions. Non-compliance often results in existing faculty taking on additional responsibilities, thereby increasing administrative and academic burdens.
- **Schedule III: Infrastructure Requirements:** Schedule III outlines essential infrastructural standards, primarily focusing on academic facilities. There is a growing need to reinterpret these requirements to include wellness spaces and mental health counselling centers as essential components of institutional infrastructure.
- **Continuing Legal Education (CLE):** While CLE provisions emphasize professional development, they largely focus on legal updates. There is scope to expand CLE to include training in mental health awareness and emotional intelligence, enabling faculty to better manage both personal wellbeing and student engagement.

Supreme Court Guidelines (Post-2024 Jurisprudence)

- Recent judicial developments, particularly following mental health crises in premier institutions, have elevated mental wellbeing to a constitutional concern under Article 21.

- **Recognition of the Right to Mental Health:** The Supreme Court has affirmed that the right to life includes the right to mental wellbeing. This interpretation can be extended to include educators, recognizing their role within the academic ecosystem.
- **Anti-Stigma Directive:** The Court has emphasized the need for institutions to actively address mental health stigma. This requires a shift from viewing burnout as individual inefficiency to recognizing it as a systemic issue.
- **Mandatory Counselling Mechanisms:** Institutions are now required to establish functional counselling systems. However, these are largely student-centric, leaving faculty without structured support.
- **Strengthening Grievance Redressal Systems:** Judicial directions have encouraged the creation of robust and confidential grievance mechanisms. Extending these systems to faculty would allow them to report workplace challenges without fear of professional repercussions.

Comparative Pedagogical Priorities in Common Law Jurisdictions

To understand the crisis of faculty burnout in India, it is useful to situate Indian legal education within a comparative framework of other common law jurisdictions. While countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have evolved relatively stable pedagogical models over time, India is currently navigating a complex transition seeking to balance global academic standards with its constitutional commitment to mass accessibility.

The United Kingdom: Doctrinal Depth and Precision

Legal education in the United Kingdom is grounded in doctrinal clarity and analytical precision. Institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge emphasize black-letter law and rigorous engagement with legal principles. The tutorial system, characterized by small-group teaching, demands deep intellectual engagement from both students and faculty. While this model is intellectually demanding, faculty responsibilities are clearly defined and primarily academic in nature. As a result, stress tends to be intellectual rather than administrative, and quality is measured by depth of scholarship and clarity of legal reasoning.

The United States: Analytical Agility and Socratic Engagement

In contrast, the United States prioritizes analytical thinking and courtroom-style reasoning through the Socratic and case-study methods. Law classrooms are highly interactive, requiring students to engage actively with legal problems and arguments. Faculty are expected to facilitate high-level intellectual exchanges, often under significant performative pressure. However, since legal education in the US is postgraduate, faculty typically engage with students who possess prior academic maturity. While the system is demanding, it produces adaptable legal professionals capable of complex reasoning.

India: Between Accessibility and Excellence

India's legal education system faces a unique dual challenge. On one hand, it must ensure widespread access to legal education, given the large number of institutions and students. On the other, it aspires to meet global standards of academic excellence, particularly through institutions such as the National Law Universities (NLUs). This creates a structural tension.

Faculty in India are often required to balance multiple roles: teaching large classes, managing administrative responsibilities, mentoring students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and producing research that meets international benchmarks. The expectation to generate high-quality research despite limited institutional support and heavy workloads places considerable strain on educators. Unlike their counterparts in the UK or US, Indian faculty often perform additional roles that extend beyond traditional academic responsibilities.

Pedagogical Differences and Classroom Experience

The differences in pedagogical approaches further highlight these contrasts. Indian legal education has traditionally relied on lecture-based teaching, particularly in non-NLU institutions, where emphasis is often placed on statutory learning and examination preparation. In the United States, the Socratic method fosters critical thinking through active classroom participation, while the UK tutorial system emphasizes individualized learning and in-depth analysis.

Professional Pathways and Training

The transition from legal education to professional practice also varies significantly. In India, entry into the profession requires passing the All India Bar Examination, which primarily tests

basic legal knowledge. In contrast, the UK and US have more structured and rigorous qualification processes, including professional training courses and high-stakes bar examinations. Australia further integrates practical legal training, ensuring exposure to real-world legal practice before professional entry.

Key Challenges and Emerging Convergence

Recent developments indicate a gradual convergence across jurisdictions. Indian institutions, particularly NLUs, are increasingly adopting interactive and problem-based learning methods. Clinical legal education has also gained prominence, emphasizing experiential learning and social justice. At the same time, global advancements in legal technology are reshaping pedagogy, with countries like the US and UK integrating AI-based research tools, while India continues to adapt to these changes.

In the Indian Context the central challenge for India lies in reconciling its commitment to accessibility with the demands of global academic competitiveness. Unlike the relatively specialized roles of faculty in the UK and US, Indian legal educators are expected to perform multiple functions simultaneously academic, administrative, and social. This structural imbalance places them at the center of systemic pressures, making faculty burnout not merely an individual issue but a consequence of broader institutional design.

The “Wellness Protocol”: A Regulatory Framework for Law Faculty

The proposed “Wellness Protocol” seeks to shift the responsibility for mental health from individual faculty members to institutional and regulatory structures. At the structural level, there is a need to move beyond the current emphasis on “contact hours,” which fails to account for the cognitive demands of legal teaching. A recalibrated workload model, such as a 70/30 distribution, can ensure that administrative duties and mentorship responsibilities are formally recognized as part of faculty workload rather than treated as additional burdens. Further, introducing periodic mini-sabbaticals would allow faculty to engage in meaningful jurisprudential research, thereby addressing intellectual fatigue and stagnation.

Institutional reform must also include the integration of mental health support systems that extend beyond students. Law institutions should be required to establish confidential Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) for faculty, ensuring access to professional counselling without fear of stigma. Additionally, mental health indicators should be incorporated into

evaluation frameworks such as NIRF and NAAC, encouraging institutions to prioritize faculty wellbeing alongside academic performance.

Addressing the challenges of digital overreach is equally important. The increasing “always-on” culture can be mitigated through formal policies that define digital boundaries, limiting non-essential communication beyond working hours. At the same time, administrative burdens can be reduced through digital standardization and automation, allowing faculty to focus more on teaching and research rather than procedural tasks.

Finally, capacity building and sensitization are essential components of this framework. Faculty should be provided with training in emotional intelligence and pedagogical wellness, equipping them to manage classroom dynamics and student distress effectively. Institutional leadership must also adopt more empathetic and collaborative approaches, moving away from rigid administrative models. Collectively, these measures aim to create a more sustainable, supportive, and intellectually productive academic environment within legal education.

The existing regulatory framework under bodies such as the BCI and UGC largely adopts a quantitative approach, particularly in relation to faculty workload, which is measured primarily in terms of the number of lectures delivered. In contrast, the proposed “Wellness Protocol” advocates a more qualitative perspective that accounts not only for teaching hours but also for mentorship responsibilities and administrative duties. Similarly, the current research culture is driven by a “publish or perish” model that emphasizes output quantity, whereas the proposed framework shifts the focus towards quality by encouraging meaningful scholarship and supporting mechanisms such as incentivized sabbaticals. In the domain of mental health, the present system remains largely student-centric and voluntary, often overlooking the needs of faculty members; the proposed model, however, seeks to create a faculty-inclusive and mandatory support structure. Finally, while communication practices currently remain largely unregulated resulting in continuous digital accessibility whereas the Wellness Protocol recommends the establishment of formalized digital boundaries to ensure a healthier work-life balance for educators.

Conclusion: From Professional Resilience to Institutional Responsibility

The theme of this study, “*Teaching the Law, Weathering the Storm,*” reflects both the present realities of Indian legal academia and the urgent need for reform. As this research demonstrates, faculty burnout is not simply an individual challenge but a systemic

consequence of an educational model that prioritizes expansion, rankings, and output-driven metrics over the wellbeing of educators.

The impact of this crisis extends beyond the faculty themselves. When educators operate under sustained psychological strain, the quality of jurisprudential teaching inevitably declines. The shift from dialogic, inquiry-based learning to mechanical, exam-oriented instruction is a direct outcome of this exhaustion. If issues such as administrative overload and the pressures of constant digital engagement remain unaddressed, legal education risks producing professionals who approach law as a technical obligation rather than a meaningful pursuit of justice.

The Path Forward: A BCI Special Circular

Addressing this challenge requires a shift from informal coping strategies to structured institutional reform. In this regard, the Bar Council of India (BCI), under its regulatory authority, is well-positioned to initiate meaningful change. It is proposed that the BCI introduce a **“Special Circular on Faculty Wellbeing and Academic Sustainability.”**

Such a circular should move beyond advisory recommendations and establish a **mandatory Wellness Protocol** as part of affiliation requirements for law institutions. This framework should aim to:

- Ensure that faculty workloads are regulated to allow sufficient time for research, mentorship, and intellectual engagement.
- Institutionalize support systems such as confidential Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) and counselling services for faculty.
- Encourage the establishment of clear digital boundaries to protect time for focused academic work and reflection.

By embedding these measures within the regulatory structure, faculty wellbeing can be treated as an essential component of academic quality.

The legal profession is often regarded as a pillar of justice and democratic governance. However, its strength ultimately depends on the quality and wellbeing of those who educate future practitioners. Supporting the mental health of law faculty is not a matter of institutional generosity but a fundamental requirement for sustaining the integrity of legal education.

A proactive and structured approach such as the proposed Wellness Protocol can help create an academic environment that is both intellectually rigorous and psychologically supportive. In doing so, it ensures that legal educators are not merely enduring professional pressures, but are equipped to guide students with clarity, empathy, and critical insight.

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