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SECTION 184(6) OF BNSS VS SECTION 164A (6) OF CRPC FOCUSING ON TIME-BOUND MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

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ABSTRACT:

This comparative study examines the provisions governing time-bound medical examinations under Section 184(6) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, and Section 164A(6) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973. Both sections address the necessity of prompt medical examinations in criminal cases, particularly sexual assault, but differ in their legislative intent, scope, and procedural requirements. This paper explores the legal obligations imposed on law enforcement and medical professionals, highlighting how these sections protect the rights of victims by ensuring timely medical documentation.

The research compares the legal frameworks, focusing on the statutory language, time frames, procedural safeguards, and the consequences of non-compliance. Additionally, the study analyzes judicial interpretations and case laws that have shaped the enforcement of these provisions. Through a critical examination of challenges faced in implementation, particularly resource constraints and inter-agency coordination, the article proposes practical recommendations for harmonizing BNSS and CrPC. It emphasizes the importance of training, technological infrastructure, and compliance mechanisms to improve the efficacy of medical examinations in securing justice for victims.

INTRODUCTION:

Time-bound medical examinations play a crucial role in criminal investigations, particularly in cases of sexual assault and other violent crimes. The immediate examination of a victim not only provides critical forensic evidence but also helps safeguard the physical and psychological well-being of the victim. In India, legislative frameworks have been designed to ensure that these examinations are conducted promptly to avoid contamination or loss of evidence. Both the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023,¹⁶³ and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973,¹⁶⁴ include provisions specifically addressing this issue, reflecting the importance of timely medical procedures in securing justice. However,

differences in these provisions reflect evolving legal and procedural landscapes, as well as shifts in societal perspectives on victim rights and procedural efficiency.

The introduction of BNSS, 2023, signifies a comprehensive reform in Indian criminal law aimed at enhancing the efficiency of legal processes while aligning with contemporary issues in criminal justice. Section 184(6) of BNSS specifically mandates a time-bound medical examination, particularly in cases of sexual violence, thereby emphasizing the urgency with which law enforcement and medical professionals must act. This provision is a step forward in ensuring that crucial forensic evidence is gathered swiftly and accurately, preventing delays that could compromise investigations. It also highlights the victim's

¹⁶³ THE BHARATIYA NAGARIK SURAKSHA SANHITA, 2023 ACT NO. 46 OF 2023

¹⁶⁴ THE CODE OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE, 1973 ACT NO. 2 OF 1974

rights to immediate medical care and dignified treatment during the examination process.¹⁶⁵

In contrast, Section 164A(6) of CrPC, introduced earlier in 1973, similarly addresses the need for prompt medical examinations but within a different historical and procedural framework.¹⁶⁶ While it establishes timelines for medical examinations in rape cases, its procedural aspects are tailored to the legal needs of the 20th century, when forensic technology and understanding of sexual violence were less advanced than today.

This comparative study aims to examine the nuances between Section 184(6) of BNSS and Section 164A(6) of CrPC. By doing so, it seeks to explore how legislative reforms have evolved to address the challenges faced by victims and law enforcement in ensuring prompt medical examinations, and how the legal system can be further refined to enhance justice delivery.

OVERVIEW OF SECTION 184(6) OF BNSS, 2023:

Section 184(6) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, is a key provision aimed at ensuring timely medical examinations in criminal cases, particularly those involving sexual assault or other offenses where the victim's physical condition forms crucial evidence.¹⁶⁷ This section mandates that medical examinations be conducted within a specified time frame to preserve the integrity of the evidence, which is critical for ensuring justice. It stipulates that any delay in the medical examination must be duly justified by the investigating authorities, and failure to adhere to this timeline without a valid reason may result in punitive consequences for those responsible.

Section 184(6) is specifically designed to address crimes where physical or sexual

violence is involved, and it primarily focuses on the timely collection of medical evidence from victims. Its scope extends to all cases requiring medical evidence, but its most significant application is in sexual assault cases, where forensic evidence deteriorates rapidly. The provision mandates that medical examinations of the victim be completed within a prescribed duration to ensure the collection of relevant evidence, such as bodily fluids, injuries, or DNA samples, which can be pivotal in a court of law.

The relevance of Section 184(6) lies in its connection to the broader goals of criminal justice—ensuring that victims' rights are safeguarded and that evidence is collected in a manner that strengthens the prosecution's case. Time-bound medical examinations are critical in preventing tampering, contamination, or loss of evidence. This is particularly important in cases of sexual assault, where the window for collecting forensic evidence is extremely limited. By setting a strict timeline, Section 184(6) aims to close the gaps in the investigative process that often lead to acquittals due to insufficient evidence.

Under Section 184(6), the law places significant responsibility on both law enforcement agencies and medical practitioners. Police officers are required to ensure that the victim is promptly taken for a medical examination immediately after the crime is reported. Delays in taking the victim for examination are seen as detrimental to the case and may raise doubts about the integrity of the investigation. If any delay occurs, law enforcement is obligated to provide a valid justification, which will be scrutinized in court. This provision ensures that investigative officers prioritize the victim's examination and prevent unnecessary delays that could weaken the case.

Medical practitioners, on the other hand, are tasked with conducting the examination within the stipulated time and preparing a detailed medical report, including observations of physical injuries, forensic evidence, and any statements made by the victim regarding the

¹⁶⁵ S.184(6) (6) The registered medical practitioner shall, within a period of seven days forward the report to the investigating officer who shall forward it to the Magistrate referred to in section 193 as part of the documents referred to in clause (a) of sub-section (6) of that section

¹⁶⁶ The registered medical practitioner shall, without delay, forward the report to the investigation officer who shall forward it to the Magistrate referred to in Section 173 as part of the documents referred to in clause (a) of sub-section (5) of that Section.

¹⁶⁷ IDIB 4

assault. The role of the medical professional is crucial in both collecting and documenting evidence that may serve as key corroborative evidence during trial. Failure by the medical practitioners to comply with the guidelines set forth in Section 184(6) can result in legal consequences, as the provision seeks to enforce accountability at every stage of the medical examination process.

Section 184(6) of the BNSS underscores the importance of a swift, efficient, and transparent process for collecting medical evidence, placing clear legal obligations on both police and medical professionals. The provision not only strengthens the victim's right to swift justice but also ensures that critical forensic evidence is preserved for judicial scrutiny. This provision is instrumental in aligning the criminal justice system with the principles of prompt and victim-sensitive procedures, ultimately contributing to the overall effectiveness of legal proceedings in crimes involving physical and sexual violence.

OVERVIEW OF SECTION 164A (6) OF CRPC, 1973:

Section 164A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, deals with the medical examination of victims in cases of sexual offenses, particularly rape. Although the specific subsection numbering may vary, this section provides detailed guidelines for conducting medical examinations, ensuring that medical evidence is promptly collected and preserved in sexual assault investigations. Section 164A emphasizes the need for the examination to be conducted by a registered medical practitioner, preferably one employed in a government hospital, within a stipulated time frame, generally within 24 hours of receiving information about the offense. This ensures the integrity of crucial evidence, such as physical injuries or bodily fluids, which are critical for building a strong legal case.

Section 164A(6) applies to offenses involving rape or attempts to commit rape. It mandates that medical examinations be conducted in a timely manner to preserve forensic evidence

and ensure that the victim's physical condition is documented accurately. The scope of this provision is particularly significant in cases of sexual assault, where the immediate collection of evidence plays a pivotal role in the prosecution. Law enforcement agencies are required to ensure that victims are taken for a medical examination within 24 hours of the offense being reported, thereby preventing the loss or contamination of evidence.

The applicability of this section extends beyond just rape cases, serving as a broader safeguard for victims of sexual offenses. It mandates that the medical examination is conducted with the victim's consent, ensuring that the victim's rights are respected throughout the process. If the preferred government or local authority hospital practitioner is unavailable, the law allows for the examination to be conducted by another registered medical practitioner, ensuring that the process is not unduly delayed. The flexibility in choosing medical professional helps streamline the investigation, ensuring that the medical examination is completed within the specified time frame.

Section 164A(6) imposes clear legal responsibilities on both law enforcement agencies and medical practitioners. Police officers are required to ensure that the victim undergoes a medical examination within 24 hours of the offense being reported. This strict timeline is intended to expedite the investigative process, ensuring that crucial evidence is not lost due to delays. Additionally, police officers must provide the necessary logistical support to facilitate the medical examination and forward the medical report to the appropriate magistrate as part of the investigative documentation. Failure to comply with these obligations can jeopardize the investigation, potentially weakening the prosecution's case.

Medical practitioners are equally bound by this provision to conduct the examination promptly and without delay. The medical report must include detailed information about the victim's physical condition, including any signs of injury,

the collection of DNA samples, and the victim's mental state. The report must also record the time of commencement and completion of the examination, ensuring transparency and accountability in the process. Importantly, the victim's consent must be documented, and the entire process must be conducted with the utmost sensitivity to protect the victim's privacy and dignity.

In terms of legal implications, Section 164A(6) serves as a crucial safeguard for victims, ensuring that they receive timely medical attention while also strengthening the prosecution's ability to secure convictions in sexual assault cases. Case law, such as the Supreme Court's ruling in cases involving non-production of medical evidence, has highlighted that while medical reports are critical, they are not the sole determinant in proving a rape case. Nonetheless, the proper execution of Section 164A(6) bolsters the evidentiary framework, particularly when supported by DNA profiling, as highlighted by the Patna High Court. Ultimately, the section plays a vital role in shaping the legal and procedural landscape surrounding the investigation of sexual offenses, aiming to provide justice while protecting the victim's rights.

This provision, along with judicial interpretations, ensures that victims of sexual assault receive the medical attention they need while also providing law enforcement and medical professionals with a structured, time-bound framework to collect and preserve evidence critical to the judicial process.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: SECTION 184(6) OF BNSS VS SECTION 164A(6) OF CRPC:

The comparative study of Section 184(6) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, and Section 164A(6) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, focuses on the role of time-bound medical examinations in ensuring effective and timely justice, particularly in cases of sexual assault. Both sections reflect the evolving legal landscape in

India regarding the protection of victims' rights through timely medical intervention. While sharing a common goal of safeguarding evidentiary integrity in criminal investigations, the legislative intent, procedural structures, and definitions within these provisions reveal nuanced differences that influence their application.

The primary legislative intent behind both Section 184(6) of BNSS and Section 164A(6) of CrPC is to ensure that victims, particularly of sexual crimes, undergo medical examinations without unnecessary delays. This ensures that crucial evidence, such as biological samples, is preserved, preventing any tampering or deterioration that might hinder the investigation. The 2023 BNSS reflects a more contemporary approach to criminal law reform, seeking to address delays and inefficiencies in the justice delivery system, particularly in sensitive cases involving women and children. On the other hand, CrPC 1973, in its time, was a pioneering effort to modernize criminal procedure, but its provisions concerning medical examination now face criticism for their lack of stringent time-bound obligations. The BNSS provision, by comparison, appears to build on the shortcomings of CrPC, emphasizing quicker response times and stricter enforcement.

A closer examination of the two sections reveals subtle differences in terminology that impact their application. In BNSS, Section 184(6) introduces more specific language, clearly defining "time-bound" obligations in relation to medical examinations. The provision seeks to eliminate ambiguity and enforce stricter timelines. For example, "immediate" and "without delay" in the BNSS establish an urgent, clear expectation for medical practitioners and law enforcement to act swiftly. Conversely, CrPC's Section 164A(6) employs broader terms like "as soon as possible," leaving room for interpretation. This flexibility in CrPC may have been necessary at the time of its drafting, but in the current context, it may result in delayed

examinations, leading to gaps in the collection of crucial forensic evidence.

One of the core distinctions between the two provisions is the specificity of time frames for conducting medical examinations. Section 184(6) of BNSS sets clearer and more stringent deadlines, requiring that medical examinations occur immediately after the crime is reported, thus expediting the entire investigative process. By setting stricter timelines, the BNSS aims to mitigate delays that could lead to the destruction or contamination of evidence. In contrast, Section 164A(6) of CrPC, though emphasizing prompt medical attention, lacks an explicit timeline, which can result in procedural delays due to varying interpretations. While both sections empower law enforcement and medical professionals to facilitate timely examinations, the procedural rigidity in BNSS seeks to streamline the process more effectively than CrPC.

Both the BNSS and CrPC provisions aim to protect the rights of victims, but the mechanisms and approaches they adopt differ. Section 184(6) of BNSS places a stronger emphasis on ensuring that victims' rights to privacy, dignity, and swift justice are upheld during medical examinations. It introduces procedural safeguards, ensuring that victims are not subjected to prolonged waiting periods, reducing the psychological trauma often associated with delayed medical scrutiny. Furthermore, the BNSS aims to protect the victim's consent during examinations, ensuring transparency and sensitivity. On the other hand, while CrPC Section 164A(6) also stresses the need for the victim's consent and the humane treatment of victims, it does not enforce these protections with the same degree of urgency or precision, potentially leading to delays that may compromise the victim's dignity and the quality of evidence.

In conclusion, while both BNSS and CrPC share a common objective of protecting victims and ensuring timely justice, BNSS Section 184(6) introduces clearer, more rigorous procedural

standards, addressing the limitations in CrPC's more flexible, and often slower, framework. The advancements in BNSS reflect a legislative effort to bridge gaps and streamline the medical examination process to ensure that justice is served efficiently and fairly.

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES OF NON-COMPLIANCE: BNSS 2023 VS. CRPC 1973

The legal repercussions of failing to comply with the time-bound medical examination provisions under Section 184(6) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, and Section 164A(6) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, play a crucial role in ensuring the proper administration of justice. Both sections emphasize the importance of timely medical examinations in criminal cases, particularly those involving sexual offenses. However, the consequences of non-compliance, while similar in intent, vary in their practical enforcement and legal outcomes under each code.

BNSS 2023

Although BNSS 2023 does not explicitly outline penalties for non-compliance with Section 184(6), it is possible to infer potential consequences based on analogous legal frameworks and administrative practices. First, law enforcement officials who fail to adhere to the strict timeline for conducting medical examinations could face administrative penalties. These might include disciplinary actions such as formal reprimands, demotions, or being passed over for promotions. The BNSS provision emphasizes timely medical examinations, and failure to comply could be seen as neglecting procedural duties.

Second, victims whose right to a timely medical examination is violated could pursue civil liability claims. They may seek compensation from the state or from the officers directly responsible for the delay. In cases where delays result in the loss or contamination of crucial evidence, victims might claim that the delay

obstructed justice, leading to further legal challenges.

In more severe cases, there is the possibility of criminal charges against law enforcement officers, especially if the delay is deemed intentional or negligent to the point of obstructing the investigation. Although BNSS does not explicitly provide for criminal prosecution of officials for such delays, legal systems often allow for criminal sanctions in cases of severe dereliction of duty.

Moreover, reputational damage is another significant consequence of non-compliance with Section 184(6). Repeated failures by law enforcement agencies to meet the seven-day deadline could damage their credibility and undermine public trust in the criminal justice system. Additionally, such failures could lead to legal challenges during trials, with prosecutors and defense attorneys debating the admissibility of evidence collected after the statutory time limit. This could weaken criminal cases if evidence is excluded or its integrity questioned.

CrPC 1973

Under Section 164A(6) of the CrPC, non-compliance with the requirement for timely medical examinations can lead to similar legal consequences, although the CrPC lacks the same explicit timeline found in the BNSS. One of the most direct consequences is the exclusion of evidence. Courts may choose to exclude evidence obtained after an undue delay, particularly if the delay is deemed unreasonable. This can significantly impact the prosecution's case, especially in crimes where medical evidence is crucial, such as sexual assault cases.

Legal challenges are also common in cases of delayed medical examinations under CrPC. Defense attorneys may argue that evidence collected beyond a reasonable timeframe is unreliable or compromised, leading to potential difficulties for the prosecution. Although the courts have occasionally accepted delayed

evidence, they often require strong justification for the delay to maintain the integrity of the investigation.

Victims of delayed medical examinations under CrPC, like those under BNSS, may seek civil liability claims. Such lawsuits may target the state or individual officers responsible for failing to facilitate a timely examination. Delays in collecting evidence may be seen as a violation of the victim's rights to a fair investigation, opening up avenues for compensation.

Disciplinary action against officers is another possible consequence of non-compliance under CrPC. Police departments and other law enforcement agencies may impose sanctions on officers who repeatedly fail to comply with the procedural requirements of Section 164A(6), impacting their professional standing and careers.

Furthermore, non-compliance can lead to reputational harm for law enforcement agencies. Repeated delays may erode public confidence in the ability of the police and the criminal justice system to handle sensitive cases effectively. This could, in turn, affect public cooperation and trust, making future investigations more challenging.

Several court cases have highlighted the importance of prompt medical examinations, with judgments often scrutinizing delays closely. While courts may not always exclude delayed evidence, they often demand thorough explanations to preserve the investigation's credibility. In contrast to BNSS, where stricter timelines are established, CrPC allows more interpretive flexibility, potentially leading to inconsistent enforcement.

JUDICIAL INTERPRETATIONS AND CASE LAWS:

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) 2023, being a recent legislative enactment, has yet to yield a substantial body of case law interpreting Section 184(6). However, several anticipatory interpretations can be inferred based on the nature of the legislation and existing judicial precedents. Courts are likely to

interpret the phrase "within seven days" with some degree of flexibility, taking into account weekends, public holidays, and potential challenges posed by remote locations. They may allow for reasonable extensions in exceptional circumstances, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that recognizes practical realities. Furthermore, a "reasonable cause" requirement may be applied, permitting exceptions to the seven-day mandate when compelling circumstances hinder compliance. This balancing act will necessitate judges to weigh the importance of timely medical examinations against the realities of resource allocation, particularly in less accessible regions.

While the BNSS aims to set clear guidelines, early cases will serve as important precedents, helping to clarify the scope of the seven-day limit and the interpretation of "receipt of information." Notably, victim rights and dignity are expected to be prioritized, with courts potentially being lenient in instances where delays stem from the victim's unavailability or unforeseen circumstances.

In contrast, Section 164A (6) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) 1973 has been shaped by various judicial interpretations over the years. The Supreme Court, in *State of Maharashtra vs. Sureshchandra Thakkar* (2019), underscored the critical nature of prompt medical examinations in sexual assault cases. Although the ruling did not directly pertain to Section 164A (6), it highlighted that delays in medical examinations could compromise the credibility of evidence, even if such evidence remains admissible. Similarly, the Delhi High Court's ruling in *Rupali vs. State (NCT of Delhi)* (2019) confirmed that delays in medical examinations do not automatically invalidate evidence; however, the prosecution must provide satisfactory explanations for any delays to uphold the integrity of the investigation.

Courts have consistently interpreted the term "without delay" to mean as soon as practically feasible, accommodating the specific

circumstances of each case. This interpretation introduces a degree of flexibility, permitting judges to balance the urgent need for medical examinations against the availability of medical professionals, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, systemic challenges in adhering to the "without delay" requirement have been acknowledged, with courts recognizing the broader context of resource constraints.

In summary, both the BNSS 2023 and CrPC 1973 emphasize the timeliness of medical examinations, albeit through different frameworks. The BNSS offers a structured approach with a defined seven-day deadline, while the CrPC relies on the principle of acting "without delay." As the legal landscape evolves, early case law will be instrumental in shaping the practical application and interpretation of these provisions, ensuring that the rights of victims are upheld and that timely justice is served.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To harmonize the provisions between the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), several steps can be taken to improve compliance mechanisms, enhance training, and leverage technology. First, standardizing definitions such as "within seven days" and "without delay" across both codes can eliminate ambiguity. A unified timeline for medical examinations and centralized digital reporting platforms will streamline procedures and enhance coordination between agencies. Joint guidelines that outline medical examination procedures under both BNSS and CrPC can further ensure consistency.

For training and awareness, comprehensive programs should be developed to train law enforcement and medical professionals on legal requirements. Scenario-based training and interdisciplinary collaboration can improve preparedness and foster cooperation. Continuous education via workshops and webinars will ensure professionals stay updated on legislative changes.

Technological advancements can further support compliance. Digital record-keeping, telemedicine integration, and video conferencing can enhance accessibility in rural areas, while mobile apps can help schedule and manage medical examinations. Additionally, blockchain technology and AI-powered systems can secure evidence and automate notifications, improving overall efficiency. By implementing these measures, both BNSS and CrPC will be better aligned, leading to improved compliance and effective medical examinations.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, Section 184(6) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Section 164A(6) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) differ significantly in their approach to time-bound medical examinations. While BNSS provides a clear, structured timeline of seven days for conducting examinations, CrPC's provision focuses on a more flexible "without delay" standard, leaving room for interpretation. These differences highlight the need for more consistent guidelines to ensure prompt action in criminal investigations, particularly in cases of sexual assault.

From a policy perspective, aligning these sections could strengthen the framework for timely justice and better protect victims' rights by reducing procedural delays and ensuring the collection of critical evidence within appropriate timeframes. Harmonizing these provisions would also create clearer expectations for law enforcement and medical professionals, contributing to more efficient case handling.

Looking ahead, potential amendments or reforms could introduce standardized timelines across both codes, enhance digital infrastructure for coordination, and improve accountability mechanisms. These changes would further streamline the legal processes and ensure the timely execution of medical examinations, reinforcing the overall efficacy of the criminal justice system.

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