

A LEGAL STUDY ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN INDIA: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POCSO ACT, 2012

AUTHOR – RAJ SONI, STUDENT AT SCHOOL OF LAW, CHRIST (DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY), BANGALORE

BEST CITATION – RAJ SONI, A LEGAL STUDY ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN INDIA: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POCSO ACT, 2012, *INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW (IJLR)*, 6 (1) OF 2026, PG. 131-144, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN – 2583-2344.

ABSTRACT

This research paper looks at the serious and often overlooked problem of child sexual abuse (CSA) in India, with a special focus on how the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, is being used in practice. By studying NCRB data from 2015 to 2022 and reviewing landmark cases, it shows a sharp rise in reported CSA cases along with the huge backlog of trials, pointing to a big gap between the promise of strong laws and how they are applied on the ground. Conviction rates remain low, between 29.6% and 39.6%, mainly because of weak evidence, delays in court, and witnesses turning hostile. Deep-rooted social barriers like stigma, fear of family dishonour, and patriarchal attitudes further stop victims from reporting cases, while new online dangers such as grooming and AI-generated child sexual abuse material are creating fresh hurdles for police and courts. The paper also examines constitutional and international commitments to child protection, changes brought into the POCSO Act—including the introduction of the death penalty in certain cases—and the ongoing debate over whether harsher punishments actually improve justice delivery. It also emphasises the significance of victim-sensitive methods, trauma-informed policies, and rehabilitation in order to guarantee survivors true justice. The paper makes the case that reforms need to be more than merely passing new legislation, using a combination of statistics, legal analysis, and international comparisons. To effectively address CSA, India needs to increase social awareness, fortify digital safety, and expedite investigations and trials. Only a holistic approach combining law, psychology, and community support can make child protection genuinely effective.

KEYWORDS: POCSO Act, Child Sexual Abuse, Judicial Backlog, Digital Crime, Victim Rehabilitation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Even with more stringent legislation aimed at protecting children, child sexual abuse is still a common and often hidden problem in India. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the quantity of instances reported under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act increased steadily between 2015 and 2022. For instance, the number of registered cases increased from approximately 36,000 in 2016 to more than 54,000 in 2021, while the number of outstanding cases more than doubled in the same period. During that period, the number of

pending cases rose steeply from nearly 90,000 to more than 205,000. Conviction rates remained relatively low, averaging between 29.6% and 39.6%, with a significant share of cases collapsing because of weak evidence, prolonged trials, or witnesses turning hostile³⁷⁰. Although official statistics for 2023 and 2024 are still pending, historical trends make it abundantly evident that the number of reported cases and pending cases is continually rising. These statistics demonstrate how urgently

³⁷⁰ *Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020*, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 17, 2025).

better legal processes, quicker case resolution, and more efficient judicial capacity that considers the particular requirements of child survivors are needed.

In order to counter sexual violence, the POCSO Act was passed in 2012 with an emphasis on the needs of children. It covers a wide range of offences, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, harassment, and pornographic exploitation, and ensures that cases are adjudicated in specialized courts. It also includes strategies for reducing trauma in children who have been harmed. The death penalty was introduced for certain aggravated crimes by changes made in 2019, and the 2020 POCSO Rules increased reporting requirements and implemented measures for greater stringency. Background investigations of those who work with children. These clauses appear to be robust on paper, but their implementation has been inconsistent. Due to a lack of specialized training for handling delicate situations among many judicial officers and police officers, as well as limited resources and varying interpretations of the law across courts, there are several gaps. Consequently, despite well-intentioned reforms, the system is still unable to provide fair and timely justice.

Since victims and their families are greatly impacted by social and cultural issues, legal systems by themselves are unable to address the issue of child sexual abuse. Many survivors lack help and justice since incidents are frequently not reported due to fear of dishonour, stigma, and patriarchal pressures. At the same time, easy access to the internet and social media platforms has opened up new risks such as grooming, sextortion, cyberbullying, and the circulation of sexual abuse content, making exploitation harder to control. These realities reveal a troubling gap between laws written in legislation and their actual functioning in society. Addressing this challenge demands more than legal reform—it requires community awareness, trauma-informed policies, and evidence-based strategies that combine legal, social, and digital interventions. Without such a

comprehensive approach, India will continue to struggle to make child protection effective.

II. UNDERSTANDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

As in many other countries of the world, child sexual abuse (CSA) is a severe and pervasive issue in India. It results in severe and enduring trauma that may have an impact on a child's physical, mental, and emotional growth. Acts requiring physical touch are not the only ones covered under CSA. It is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as any sexual interaction involving a child who is not emotionally or developmentally ready for it, cannot completely comprehend it, or cannot give informed consent³⁷¹. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, has expanded this understanding into a legal framework that is gender-neutral and protects every child below 18 years of age. It covers many forms of sexual abuse—both physical and non-physical. For example, it punishes penetrative sexual assault (Section 3)³⁷², non-penetrative sexual assault (Section 7)³⁷³, sexual harassment (Section 11)³⁷⁴, and even using children for pornography (Section 13)³⁷⁵. It also recognises modern forms of exploitation like online grooming, sextortion, and child trafficking for sexual purposes. This broad scope ensures that the law addresses all possible ways in which children might be exploited, especially with the rise of the internet and social media platform³⁷⁶.

A. Psychological and Social Impact

Sexual abuse of children can have terrible, long-lasting consequences that go well beyond childhood. Emotional and psychological problems like anxiety, depression, difficulty

³⁷¹ *Child maltreatment*, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (Nov. 5, 2024), <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment> (last visited on Sept. 17, 2025).

³⁷² Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 3, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

³⁷³ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 7, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

³⁷⁴ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 11, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

³⁷⁵ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 13, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

³⁷⁶ SHARON F. DALEY & SCOTT GUTOVITZ, *CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE* (StatPearls Publishing 2025).

controlling anger, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and, in certain situations, substance abuse are common among survivors. Additionally, it can interfere with their education, impair their capacity to learn, and make it more difficult for them to form wholesome and fulfilling relationships down the road. The majority of survivors experience social exclusion or rejection from their family, which aggravates their trauma and makes rehabilitation more difficult³⁷⁷. The legal system can also be overwhelming for children—courtrooms and legal procedures often feel confusing and frightening, which can make them relive their trauma during the process. This shows why a child-sensitive legal and support system is needed, one that not only punishes offenders but also protects children from further emotional harm and supports their recovery³⁷⁸.

B. Statistical Overview: The Paradox of Increased Reporting

Over the past ten years, there has been a consistent rise in cases filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). For instance, 36,022 cases were reported throughout India in 2016 alone³⁷⁹. Although this rise might at first seem to point to an increase in child sexual abuse, the reality is more complex. A higher willingness to report crimes and a better understanding of the law are the main reasons for the rise in numbers. Today's families and survivors are more comfortable with the judicial system and are better aware of their rights. In this sense, POCSO has helped create a formal pathway where victims can seek justice, and the increase in reported cases highlights progress in breaking the silence that once surrounded these crimes.

³⁷⁷ Simona Ghetti, Kristen Weede Alexander & Gail S. Goodman, *Legal Involvement in Child Sexual Abuse Cases: Consequences and Interventions*, 25 INT'L J. L. & PSYCHIATRY, 235–251 (2002).

³⁷⁸ Ben Mathews & Delphine Collin-Vézina, *Child Sexual Abuse: Toward a Conceptual Model and Definition*, 20(2) TRAUMA VIOLENCE ABUSE, 31-148 (2019)

³⁷⁹ *Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020*, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 18, 2025).

A major challenge with child sexual abuse in India is that most cases never even reach the police. Nearly 93% of events go unreported, according to a 2018 survey conducted by the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation. Many families choose not to file complaints because of stigma, fear of dishonour, or the possibility of being held accountable, despite the fact that regulations such as the POCSO Act are in place to safeguard children. In spite of an increase in reporting over time, the majority of abuse instances go unreported, creating a contradiction. Although they are an essential first step, laws are not a cure-all. A more all-encompassing approach that includes social reforms, public awareness campaigns, strong legislation, and easily available support systems is required for real transformation. Most importantly, families must feel safe and comfortable enough to report abuse without fear of judgment or embarrassment, so that children are truly protected and offenders are held accountable.

III. EVOLUTION OF CHILD PROTECTION LAWS IN INDIA

A. Pre-Independence Legal Landscape

In colonial India, legal protection for children was almost absent, as the British legal system mainly focused on general criminal offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860. While Sections 375³⁸⁰–377³⁸¹ dealt with rape and so-called "unnatural offences," they were drafted in comprehensive terms and failed to recognize children as a vulnerable group needing special safeguards. For many years, the age of consent remained shockingly low at just ten years, and it was raised only after widespread public pressure. For a long time, children were viewed as mere smaller versions of adults, rather than as individuals with their own rights and identities. Their safety and upbringing were mostly handled by families, local communities, and religious institutions, while the government played only a minimal role. In most cases, state

³⁸⁰ Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 375, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

³⁸¹ Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 377, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

action came only after public outrage, rather than through any forward-looking or preventive efforts. A notable example of this is the Age of Consent Act, 1891³⁸², which modestly increased the legal age of consent. Following a tragic event in which an 11-year-old girl died from marital rape, the age of consent for girls was established between 10 and 12 years. Nonetheless, these adjustments were sporadic and did not address the underlying issue of child sexual abuse. The legislation protecting children remained fragmented, inadequate, and far from preventative prior to independence.

B. Post-Independence Legislative Milestones

In 1947, independent India's welfare state was created by the Constitution, which placed the primary duty of ensuring the well-being and growth of children on the government. After the colonial era, when families or voluntary organizations were largely responsible for children's welfare, the post-independence government enacted laws to protect the interests of children in an aggressive way. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act³⁸³ introduced an independent system for children in need of care or in legal problems, with an emphasis on reintegration and rehabilitation rather than retribution. The 1986 Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act³⁸⁴ was a turning point in acknowledging the necessity of legal and institutional safeguards for children. Its goal was to safeguard children's health, support their right to education, avoid exploitative and dangerous labour, and encourage their overall growth and development, as a result of India's increased dedication to protecting children.

Building on these reforms, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) of 2009³⁸⁵ guaranteed children aged 6 to 14 free

schooling, helping prevent neglect and abuse while promoting literacy and empowerment³⁸⁶. Despite these developments, a significant gap remained: child sexual assault was still covered by the Indian Penal Code³⁸⁷, which disregarded children's unique needs and the whole range of abuse or vulnerabilities. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in 2012³⁸⁸ a groundbreaking piece of legislation that created a specific, child-centred approach, was passed in 2012 in response to this disparity. The legal structure has become essential to the safety of children in India.

C. Constitutional Mandates for Child Protection

Child welfare is made a primary duty of the government by the strong moral and legal framework for child protection established by the Indian Constitution. Its provisions extend beyond typical legislation because they have binding power and direct legislative and judicial procedures. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012³⁸⁹, is thus not only a legislative advancement but also a realization of constitutional requirements. The Supreme Court has interpreted, article 21³⁹⁰, which protects the right to life and individual freedom, to include the right to live with dignity, free from exploitation and abuse. For children, this has meant recognition of their right to a safe childhood, as seen **M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu (1991)**³⁹¹, where the Court stressed that it is a constitutional requirement to protect individuals against dangerous and exploitative actions. The 86th Amendment³⁹² addition of Article 21A³⁹³ mandates that all children aged 6 to 14 attend school and get free education. In addition to providing educational possibilities, keeping children's in school serves as a crucial

³⁸² Age of Consent Act, 1891, No. 10, Acts of Parliament, 1891 (India).

³⁸³ Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, No. 2, Acts of Parliament, 2016 (India).

³⁸⁴ Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, No. 61, Acts of Parliament, 1986 (India).

³⁸⁵ Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, No. 35, Acts of Parliament, 2009 (India).

³⁸⁶ Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, No. 35, Acts of Parliament, 2009 (India).

³⁸⁷ Indian Penal Code, 1860, No. 45, Acts of Parliament, 1860 (India).

³⁸⁸ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

³⁸⁹ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 3, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

³⁹⁰ INDIA CONST. art. 21.

³⁹¹ M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu, (1991) 1 SCC 283.

³⁹² The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002.

³⁹³ INDIA CONST. art. 21A.

barrier against abuse and neglect, making education a potent tool for empowerment and protection.

Along with fundamental rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy also improve child welfare. While Article 45³⁹⁴ emphasises the need for early childhood education and care, Articles 39 (e)³⁹⁵ and (f)³⁹⁶ call on the state to safeguard children from exploitative labour and ensure their development with dignity. These principles, however, have an effect on judicial judgments even when they are not, as seen in *Lakshmi Kant Pandey v. Union of India (1984)*³⁹⁷, legally binding. They helped draft international adoption law in that instance. Overall, they reflect a constitutional perspective on making POCSO a logical extension of India's obligation to protect children from exploitation through child protection³⁹⁸.

D. International Conventions and India's Commitments

India's framework for child protection is a result of the country's international legal responsibilities. In 1992, India achieved a key milestone by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)³⁹⁹. The UNCRC, which is put forth by the UN, is very much a comprehensive treaty that member states are to protect children from all forms of abuse, exploitation and neglect, which is to date the most in-depth agreement on child rights. Article 34⁴⁰⁰ of the Convention requires states to take appropriate measures to prevent the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, while Articles 39⁴⁰¹ and 40⁴⁰² emphasize the need for victim rehabilitation

and access to justice through child-sensitive procedures.

It was necessary for India to align its national laws with international norms for child welfare and protection after ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴⁰³. However, the legal system that deals with sexual offences against children still relies heavily on old sections of the Indian Penal Code that were not intended for such crimes. To address the unique weaknesses of children. This gap highlighted the difficulty of translating international commitments into practical national law. Prior to the passage of the POCSO Act in 2012, India's legal system gave little consideration to children's specific vulnerabilities, leaving them inadequately protected from sexual exploitation. India was motivated by the UNCRC to create a legal structure that prioritises the rights and protection of children. Additionally, the government was required to forbid child pornography, internet exploitation, and cross-border trafficking after India ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (2005)⁴⁰⁴. Together, these obligations had an impact on the establishment of POCSO, which made sure that Indian legislation adhered to recognized international human rights norms.

E. 172nd Law Commission Report & Parliamentary Debates

India's path toward child protection had a significant turning point in 2000 with the 172nd Report of the Law Commission of India⁴⁰⁵. The study said that the Indian Penal Code wasn't enough to deal with child sexual abuse because it wasn't gender-neutral and didn't cover enough ground—the whole spectrum of crimes children encounter. Left beyond the law, many wrongs, including non-penetrative assaults and sexual harassment, left victims without

³⁹⁴ INDIA CONST. art. 45.

³⁹⁵ INDIA CONST. art. 39E.

³⁹⁶ INDIA CONST. art. 39F.

³⁹⁷ *Lakshmi Kant Pandey v. Union of India*, (1984) 2 SCC 244.

³⁹⁸ Smt. S. Bhargavi, *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences, 2012 – An Overview*, S3WAAAS (Sept. 11, 2024), <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ec03333cb763face6ce398ff83845f22/uploa ds/2024/09/2024091190.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 18, 2025).

³⁹⁹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 34, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

⁴⁰⁰ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 34, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

⁴⁰¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 39, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

⁴⁰² United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 40, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

⁴⁰³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 40, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, Nov. 25, 2000, G.A. Res. 54/263, 2171 U.N.T.S. 227.

⁴⁰⁵ LAW COMMISSION OF INDIA, REPORT NO. 172: REVIEW OF RAPE LAWS (2000).

adequate legal safeguards. The Commission proposed a distinct, child-centric legislation featuring gender-neutral clauses and systems for rapid trials to help lower the trauma felt by the victim. This study prepared the way for a legal system created especially to safeguard children's rights and adequately handle sexual offences against them⁴⁰⁶.

These recommendations led to the enactment of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in 2012, following years of legal debate and growing awareness about child sexual abuse. The Act made reporting such offences mandatory, established special courts for child-friendly trials, and introduced procedures suited to minors. By prohibiting both physical and non-contact abuse and prioritizing the child's welfare throughout the process, POCSO marked a comprehensive, victim-centred effort shaped by legal insight and public demand⁴⁰⁷.

IV. THE POCSO ACT, 2012: COMPREHENSIVE CHILD PROTECTION IN INDIA

A. Scope and Child-Centric Philosophy

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012 is well-known for its thorough approach and attention to the welfare of youngsters. The Act is gender-neutral and describes a youngster as anyone under eighteen⁴⁰⁸. Its core idea is to make sure the legal procedure always puts the "best interests of the child" first. Several important clauses mirror this child-centred approach. The law stipulates that every sexual crime against children must be reported so that cases are not neglected or postponed. Unique courts have been formed. To carry out quick trials will shorten the time youngsters spend negotiating the legal system. Furthermore, during inquiries and trials, child-friendly methods are used,

including the use of taped interviews and interview methods that reduce stress and trauma for young victims⁴⁰⁹.

B. Key Offences and Punishments

According to the seriousness of the offense, each of the numerous kinds of sexual offenses listed by POCSO carries a different set of penalties. In accordance with Section 3⁴¹⁰ penetrative sexual assault, carries a sentence ranging from ten years to life imprisonment, while aggravated penetrative sexual assault under Section 5⁴¹¹ may result in imprisonment of twenty years to life or, in extreme cases, the death penalty. Sexual assault under Section 7⁴¹² carries a punishment of three to five years, and sexual harassment under Section 11⁴¹³ is punishable by up to three years in prison, along with a fine. The Act also addresses the use of children for pornographic purposes under Section 13⁴¹⁴, setting distinct guidelines for sentencing.

C. Amendments and Implementation Rules

Later, the more serious penalties, such as the death penalty, were added to the Act in 2019 for cases of aggravated penetrative sexual assault that resulted in the death of the child or left them in a persistent vegetative state. The goal of this modification was to reduce these offences significantly⁴¹⁵. Notifications of the POCSO Rules in 2020 outline a systematic framework for carrying out the Act, including clauses for interim reparations to victims to help with rehabilitation and relief⁴¹⁶. But adding the death penalty has set off a lot of arguments. Although it seeks to discourage criminals, it may

⁴⁰⁶ LAW COMMISSION OF INDIA, REPORT NO. 172: REVIEW OF RAPE LAWS 45 (2000).

⁴⁰⁷ MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT, 754 FAST TRACK COURTS, INCLUDING 404 POCSO COURTS FUNCTIONAL IN 30 STATES, DISPOSE OVER 3.06 LAKH CASES BY JANUARY 2025, PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU (MAR. 21, 2025).

⁴⁰⁸ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

⁴⁰⁹ Smt. S. Bhargavi, *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences, 2012 – An Overview*, S3WAAS (Sept. 11, 2024), <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s3ec03333cb763facc6ce398ff83845f22/uploads/2024/09/2024091190.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 19, 2025).

⁴¹⁰ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 3, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

⁴¹¹ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 5, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

⁴¹² The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 7, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

⁴¹³ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 11, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

⁴¹⁴ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, § 13, No. 32, Acts of Parliament, 2012 (India).

⁴¹⁵ The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019, No. 25, Acts of Parliament, 2019 (India).

⁴¹⁶ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2020, G.S.R. 165(E) (Mar. 9, 2020) (India).

unintentionally discourage reporting—especially if the offenders are close friends or family members. Families could think twice before reporting crimes if they worry about terrible repercussions for family members, therefore leading to family breakup and social stigma. Legal experts, including the Justice J.S. Verma Committee and the Law Commission of India, have underlined that quick enforcement of punishment and clarity are more important and better deterrents than the degree of the punishment⁴¹⁷.

V. TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND OPERATIONAL REALITIES OF THE POCSO ACT

A. Trends in Case Registration

Understanding how the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act now runs in reality depends crucially on data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). The amount of cases registered has steadily and sharply climbed following the Act's implementation. For instance, in 2016 alone, 36,022 cases were registered, and this number rose steadily over the following years. By 2017, the reported cases were 32,608, increasing to 39,827 in 2018—a 22% rise—and 47,335 in 2019, marking a 19% increase. The number of cases had increased to 54,359 by 2021⁴¹⁸. This consistent rise in recorded offences points to increased public awareness of the Act and a greater propensity to file claims of child sexual abuse. Such data imply that the Act has been somewhat effective in developing public trust and inspiring reporting at first view⁴¹⁹.

Even though more cases are being recorded under POCSO, the court system finds it difficult to manage the increasing volume of cases effectively. The growing figures both

demonstrate systemic constraints and a greater awareness of children's rights to protection. In general, reporting has gotten better, yet prompt justice is still difficult to achieve.

B. Pendency and Backlog in Special Courts

The POCSO Act requires special courts to conduct speedy trials, ideally concluding within one year of case registration. To achieve this, the government launched the centrally sponsored Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) scheme in 2019⁴²⁰. These courts were created to accelerate hearings and reduce the mounting backlog of child sexual abuse cases. By June 2025, there were 725 FTSCs operating in 29 states and Union Territories, including 392 courts that handled only POCSO cases. They have together resolved over 334,000 cases since their founding, which is a major step in enhancing child survivors' access to justice. The sheer number of pending cases, however, is still too great in spite of these advancements.

A 2025 report by the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation (KSCF) revealed that pending POCSO cases rose from 71,552 in 2015 to 226,728 by January 2022—an alarming 217% increase. While FTSCs perform better than regular courts, disposing of 9.51 cases per court per month compared to 3.26, the output still falls short of the required 165 cases per court annually. The average time to resolve a POCSO case in an FTSC is more than 500 days, which is significantly longer than the required one-year period. This glaring discrepancy between statutory objectives and actual conditions highlights more serious structural and infrastructure flaws in India's legal system⁴²¹.

C. Conviction Rates

The continually low conviction rate, which exacerbates the already tremendous backlog

⁴¹⁷ *Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, 2019 and Related Concerns*, DRISHITI IAS (2024), <https://www.drishitias.com/pdf/protection-of-children-from-sexual-offences-amendment-bill-2019-and-related-concerns.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴¹⁸ *Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020*, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴¹⁹ *Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020*, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴²⁰ *Scheme on Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) for Expedient Disposal of Cases of Rape and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act*, MINISTRY OF LAW & JUSTICE, GOVT. OF INDIA (2023), <https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s35d6646aad9bcc0be55b2c82f69750387/uploads/2024/01/202401121490725560.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴²¹ *Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020*, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

of cases, is one of the most urgent problems in the implementation of the POCSO Act. Though 2020's conviction rates—almost 95%—tell a different tale, police effort is demonstrated in 2020. The conviction rate was 29.6% in 2016; it rose somewhat to 39.6% in 2020, but then declined back to just 32% in 2021. This difference points to a flaw in the system: even if cases are looked at and reported, prosecutions are hardly ever successful. A number of things, such as inadequate investigations, a dearth of solid evidence, and the frequent hostility or withdrawal of witnesses, cause this deficiency. A large number of cases involve offenders who are known to the child—often family members or trusted acquaintances—making it more challenging for families to seek justice due to social pressure and stigma. These dynamics show that although the legislation is progressive and all-encompassing, its effectiveness is compromised by inadequate infrastructure, protracted legal proceedings, and ingrained sociocultural barriers within the legal system⁴²².

D. Key NCRB Data on POCSO Act (2012–2025)⁴²³

Year	Registered Cases	Cases Pending Trial (at year-end)	Conviction Rate (%)
2015	N/A	71,552	N/A
2016	36,022	89,999	29.6
2017	32,608	84,143	35.0
2018	39,827	108,129	37.9
2019	47,335	133,068	N/A
2020	47,221	170,271	39.6
2021	54,359	205,034	32.0
2022	63,414	226,728	29.6

Data on POCSO cases from 2015 to 2022 shows varying conviction rates, growing case backlogs, and a consistent increase in reported instances. While annual registrations increased from over 36,000 in 2016 to over 54,000 in 2021, pending cases increased from almost 90,000 to over 2 lakh, highlighting the tremendous strain on courts notwithstanding Fast Track Special Courts. Due to shaky evidence, protracted legal proceedings, and uncooperative witnesses, conviction rates—which range from 29.6% to 39.6%—remain low. As of January 2023, there were around 2.43 lakh outstanding cases; however, the NCRB has not yet released data for 2023–2024. In order to guarantee that survivors' complaints result in actual justice, these numbers highlight the critical need for reforms, including quicker trials, more robust investigations, and more child-sensitive judicial procedures.⁴²⁴

VI. JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION

The Supreme Court decision in **Attorney General for India v. Satish and Another**⁴²⁵ clarified one of the most important points. A Bombay High Court ruling that prevented sexual assault when circumstances involving "skin-to-skin" contact were quashed by the court. The accused's "sexual intent" is an especially significant consideration under the POCSO Act, the Supreme Court underlined. This court's decision maintained that those who violate cannot escape accountability through technicalities since the law's protection extends beyond physical contact to include activities that are sexually motivated or abusive in nature.

In court rulings, victim welfare is now given more and more weight. The court relied on its authority under Article 142 of the Constitution in a 2025 Supreme Court case, **In Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents, 2025**⁴²⁶ to spare a

⁴²² Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴²³ Status of POCSO Cases 2018–2020, SATYARTHI FOUNDATION (Jul. 2022) <https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2018-2020.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴²⁴ Unstarred Question No. 1106, Cases Registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 - to be answered on July 26, 2018, RAJYA SABHA DEBATES, <https://cms.rajyasabha.nic.in/UploadedFiles/Debates/OfficialDebatesDatewise/Floor/246/F26.07.2018.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴²⁵ Attorney General for India v. Satish and Another, MANU/SC/1086/2021.

⁴²⁶ In Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents, 2025 SCC OnLine SC 1200.

POCSO prisoner from a 20-year sentence. The decision was influenced by the report that demonstrated the victim's suffering during the judicial proceedings and the likelihood that the defendant's time behind bars could bring about additional damage. This decision reflects a change onto a more victim-oriented perspective that promotes sustainable health above harsh sentences, even if the court made it plain that this should not be regarded as established practice⁴²⁷.

Enforcement under POCSO presents fresh difficulties brought up by the digital age. In **S. Harish v. Inspector of Police and Another**⁴²⁸, the Madras High Court ruled under POCSO or the IT Act that only downloading or watching child pornography was not illegal. Later, the Supreme Court blasted this strategy as "terrible," stressing the challenge of using regulations created for offline crimes to online sexual exploitation and underlining how urgently the law has to be changed to address digital abuse.

Additional judicial attention has been brought on by the introduction of the death penalty via the 2019 POCSO changes. Drawing on the "rarest of rare" guideline set in **Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab**⁴²⁹, courts in situations such as **Ravi v. State of Maharashtra**⁴³⁰, for aggravated penetrative sexual assault causing great harm or death, have given the death penalty. Legal professionals caution, nevertheless, that severe penalties do not assure deterrence and could deter reporting in cases where the perpetrator is a family member. Low conviction rates following the changes indicate that, in order to guarantee justice, certainty and efficiency of punishment are more important than severity.

State of Punjab v. Anil⁴³¹, is another crucial ruling that has influenced the POCSO law. In it, the court clarified rules for documenting child

testimony and the Supreme Court greatly increased children's legal protections in the internet age in the landmark case of **Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish**⁴³², overturning a previous High Court decision, the Court ruled that watching or downloading Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM) constitutes a penal offense under Section 15 of the POCSO Act and Section 67B of the IT Act, even if it is not intended to be shared. The case introduced the concept of "constructive possession," which holds that having control over digital content can be considered possession under the law. It also requires online platforms to provide such information in order to ensure that legal protections are enforced correctly. Through this decision, the Court reaffirmed its proactive role in strengthening child protection laws to safeguard children from increasing online threats⁴³³.

VII. SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND DIGITAL ERA CHALLENGES

A. Societal Barriers to Reporting

Deep-rooted socio-cultural attitudes mostly fuel India's under-reporting of child sexual abuse. Reporting sexual abuse is greatly hampered by stigma, anxiety of dishonour, and patriarchal norms. Disclosure is difficult, especially when the offender is someone near to the youngster, such as a teacher, neighbour, or family member. Children may be further deterred from fighting or reporting abuse by cultural expectations of respect for elders. These social pressures, together with the worry of social exclusion, cause some situations to stay secret in most circumstances⁴³⁴.

Additionally, there are differences between rural and urban areas when reporting difficulties. The fear of social isolation or regular conversations with the offender might be exacerbated in rural communities by close-knit social systems and a

⁴²⁷ Gauri Kashyap, *Not a precedent: Supreme Court holds back from sentencing POCSO convict*, SUPREME COURT OBSERVER (May 29, 2025), <https://www.scobserver.in/journal/in-re-right-to-privacy-of-adolescents-not-a-precedent-supreme-court-holds-back-from-sentencing-pocso-convict/> (last visited on Sept. 20, 2025).

⁴²⁸ S. Harish v. Inspector of Police and Another, 2024 SCC OnLine Mad 40.

⁴²⁹ Bachan Singh v. State of Punjab, (1980) 2 SCC 684.

⁴³⁰ Ravi v. State of Maharashtra, (2013) ALLMR (Cr) 3143.

⁴³¹ State of Punjab v. Anil, (1992) CriJ 3131.

⁴³² Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish, 2024 SCC OnLine SC 2611.

⁴³³ Dr. Saleem Ahmed M. A., *Strengthening Legal Frameworks Against Child Sexual Exploitation: A Case Analysis of Just Rights for Children Alliance v. S. Harish*, 2024 INSC 716 (23 September 2024), 4(4) INDIAN J. LEGAL REV. 965, 965-968 (2024).

⁴³⁴ Suhas Chandran & Oth., *Under Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse: The Barriers Guarding the Silence*, 4(2) TELANGANA J. PSYCHIATRY 57 (2018).

lack of anonymity. Parents have serious incorrect assumptions, according to studies from rural Puducherry in southern India, with many considering that boys are not at risk or that women cannot sexually abuse their children. These awareness gaps directly lead to poor reporting rates and the unprotected status of many children⁴³⁵.

B. Digital Threats and Emerging Crimes

Digital technology has created new possibilities for exploitation; hence, the current legal framework finds it challenging to handle challenges. Cybercrime against Youngsters has soared; National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data show cases ranging from 232 in 2018 to 1,823 in 2022. Crimes include financial, cyber pornography, sextortion, stalking, blackmail, and internet grooming. Criminals sometimes utilize phoney online identities to befriend kids, persuade them into sharing sensitive material, or get money from them; hence, because of their dispersed and anonymous character, these crimes are challenging to identify and punish. Overview of Cases Recorded under Several Categories of Cyber Crime Against Children under 18 years of age from 2018 to 2022⁴³⁶:

Materials depicting children					
Cyber Stalking/Bullying	40	44	140	123	158
Internet Crimes through Online Games etc	0	1	0	0	2
Other Crimes against Children	141	153	220	252	416
Total Cyber Crimes against Children	232	306	1102	1376	1823

The production of artificial intelligence-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM) using generative artificial intelligence (GAI) is a very disturbing new phenomenon. Reports from the National Centre, from 6,835 cases in the first half of 2024 to 440,419 in the first half of 2025, show an increase in Missing and Exploited Children. Often, photorealistic "deepfake nudes" of youngsters produced by artificial intelligence cause significant psychological damage even in the absence of physical abuse. This technical advancement emphasizes an increasing divergence between the law and changing types of exploitation.⁴³⁷

C. Legal Adequacy in the Digital Age

Particularly, the IT Act of 2000⁴³⁸, and the POCSO Act of 2012, India's laws punish the production and dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM). They fall short, though, when it comes to just seeing or possessing such material. A contentious Madras High Court decision that found viewing or downloading child pornographic material under current laws

Crime Type	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cyber Blackmailing/Threatening/Harassment	4	3	3	23	74
Fake Profile	3	2	1	9	3
Cyber Pornography/Hosting or Publishing Obscene Sexual	44	103	738	969	1171

⁴³⁵ Anlin Jenisha & Oth., *Parental Awareness, Attitudes and Practices towards Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Community-Based Cross-Sectional Study in Rural Areas of Puducherry*, 13(4) UNIVERSAL J. PUB. HEALTH 1030 (2025).

⁴³⁶ MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU, CYBER-CRIME TARGETING CHILDREN: CRIME HEADS-WISE CASES REGISTERED UNDER CYBER CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN (BELOW 18 YRS.) DURING 2018–2022 (ANNEXURE TABLE) (2025).

⁴³⁷ Patricia Davis, *Spike in Online Crimes Against Children a "Wake-Up Call"*, NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN (Apr. 9, 2025), <https://www.missingkids.org/blog/2025/spike-in-online-crimes-against-children-a-wake-up-call> (last visited Sept. 21, 2025).

⁴³⁸ Information Technology Act, 2000, No. 21, Acts of Parliament, 2000 (India).

was not a crime showed this loophole⁴³⁹. The Supreme Court has since condemned this reading and urged the government to explain the law, emphasising the need for a consistent and stronger judicial approach. Countries all over the world are starting to change their laws to fit the new digital world. For instance, the 2025 Crime and Policing Bill of the UK⁴⁴⁰ specifically makes AI-generated child abuse images illegal, treating them as severe as actual victim content. This emphasizes the pressing need for India to change its legal system to address new online dangers, improve legal clarity, and support public knowledge and law enforcement training. POCSO's solid foundation may only be matched with adequate digital age protection by means of these changes.

VIII. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND REHABILITATION DIMENSIONS IN CHILD PROTECTION

A. Understanding the Emotional Toll of Abuse

Convictions alone do not indicate the efficacy of child protection legislation; instead, one must also evaluate how well the system helps and rehabilitates victims. Deep emotional scars from childhood sexual abuse (CSA) frequently lead to illnesses, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Apart from the abuse itself, the legal system might intensify trauma. Children going through courts frequently get questioned repeatedly, go through official procedures, and interact with staff members who might not be properly trained in methods that are sensitive to youngsters⁴⁴¹. These surroundings can cause re-victimization, in which children relive terrible events, feel guilty or afraid, or become confused or uncomfortable. There is an urgent need for

trauma-informed judicial tools because, in some cases, the court itself can unintentionally worsen emotional harm by lacking child-friendly processes.

B. Frameworks for Rehabilitation and Support

Under the POCSO Act, children going through court processes are protected and supported by certain guidelines. It enables the appointment of a support person to help the youngster navigate inquiry and trial, therefore guaranteeing their voice is heard and they feel emotionally safe. The law also gives money to help victims pay for rehabilitation and medical care. An integrated approach is offered by government programs like One Stop Centres (OSCs)⁴⁴², which combine medical care, legal advice, and psychiatric counselling in one location. The goal of these centres is to make resources more easily accessible and assist survivors in moving from crisis to recovery without having to deal with disjointed services.

C. Towards a Victim-Centric Justice System

POCSO and other effective child protection legislation demand a strategy based on trauma that prioritizes the mental and emotional health of child victims over merely following the law. To respond politely and avoid repeated trauma, all professionals who deal with children, including magistrates, attorneys, and police, must receive counselling. Institutions like the International Justice Mission argue that justice should put healing ahead of increasing suffering. Children receive constant emotional support when mental health professionals are involved in the legal process, and survivors feel safer when appropriate training and kid-friendly procedures are followed. Beyond simple procedural conformity, a truly child-centric approach provides continuous support and rehabilitation together with legal intervention. Promoting recovery and resilience will help POCSO to transform the court system into a

⁴³⁹ Sushovan Patnaik, *Supreme Court holds that viewing, storing and possessing 'child pornography' is punishable under POCSO Act; overturns Madras HC decision*, SUPREME COURT OBSERVER (Sept. 24, 2024), <https://www.scobserver.in/journal/supreme-court-holds-that-viewing-storing-and-possessing-child-pornography-is-punishable-under-pocsso-act-overturns-madras-hc-decision/> (last visited on Sept. 21, 2025).

⁴⁴⁰ Crime and Policing Bill, 2025, No. 187 of 2025 (U.K.).

⁴⁴¹ National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, *Model Guidelines with Respect to Support Persons under Section 39 of the POCSO Act*, NCPCR (2024), <https://py.gov.in/sites/default/files/wcd18112024guide.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 21, 2025).

⁴⁴² Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Standard Operating Procedures for One Stop Centres (OSCs)*, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (2025), <https://missionshakti.wcd.gov.in/public/documents/whatsnew/SoP-OSCs.pdf> (last visited on Sept. 21, 2025).

protective and therapeutic environment that will solve the difficult psychological effects of sexual abuse. At the same time, it meets its primary goal of keeping youngsters safe⁴⁴³.

IX. COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO CHILD PROTECTION

A. Learning from Global Legal Standards

Reviewing universal child protection structures shows that a number of jurisdictions have used innovative strategies that beyond conventional ideas of child safety. For instance, the United Kingdom's Sexual Offences Act, 2003⁴⁴⁴ takes a strong stance on the abuse of trust. Even if the youngster is 16 years old, it makes sexual relations between adults in positions of power, such as teachers or coaches, and children in their care illegal. or 17, the age at which consent is typically presumed. This recognizes the power disparity in such connections and makes sure that children are not taken advantage of in the name of consent. In contrast, Australia has taken things a step further by establishing a legal obligation for everyone. requiring adults to report possible cases of child sexual abuse and imposing criminal penalties for those who do not. The country has also reformed its evidentiary rules, protecting children from humiliating or aggressive questioning in court and permitting prerecorded testimony to minimise re-traumatisation. Similarly, the UK's forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill 2025⁴⁴⁵ explicitly addresses artificial intelligence-produced child sexual abuse content is specifically addressed, insuring that digitally created exploitation has been treated with the same gravity as actual abuse.

B. The Scandinavian Model of Collaboration

Particularly in Norway and Sweden, Scandinavia's emphasis has been on organized, specialized reactions to child sexual abuse. To address offences that are difficult to solve, Sweden has set up specialized online CSA units

that closely collaborate with prosecutors right from the start of an inquiry. Erratic and quick-moving in the virtual world. These nations also understand that such crimes transcend borders. They enable their legal systems to charge Swedish criminals for child sexual offences committed abroad by doing away with the "dual criminality" rule⁴⁴⁶. In a linked world where abuse may cross boundaries both physically and digitally, this extraterritorial strategy is especially crucial. Norway and Sweden have also included child protection extensively in their national action plans, therefore lengthening the statutory limitation periods for major crimes and grounding victim support within global commitments⁴⁴⁷.

C. Enhancing India's Child Protection through Global Insights

Offering gender-neutral protection to all those under 18 and imposing severe punishment for serious violations, India's POCSO Act 2012 is a seminal legislation. It adopts child-friendly steps to reduce the emotional stress that children suffer via setting up particular courts and organizing individual sessions. However, issues including technical challenges, administrative challenges, and lack of training for the judiciary, police officers, and other stakeholders may reduce the POCSO Act's general effectiveness. India's system is still disjointed, in contrast to the United Kingdom and the United States, where victim support, prosecution, and enforcement have been interdependent from the beginning. While the law itself is strong, the supporting infrastructure—like digital forensics, counselling, and rehabilitation services—requires significant strengthening to function effectively.

India may learn essential things from worldwide trends. Australia's changes allowing

⁴⁴³ International Justice Mission India, *Human Trafficking*, IJM INDIA (2011), <https://ijmindia.org/> (last visited on Sept. 21, 2025).

⁴⁴⁴ Sexual Offences Act, 2003, § 5, c. 42, Acts of Parliament, 2003 (U.K.).

⁴⁴⁵ Crime and Policing Bill, 2025, No. 187 of 2025 (U.K.).

⁴⁴⁶ Government of Sweden - Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, *National Action Plan for Safeguarding Children from Sexual Exploitation*, S.2008.024 (Sept. 2, 2008; updated May 17, 2015), <https://www.government.se/contentassets/fb78975ee42f41349f782189fbce929a/national-action-plan-for-safeguarding-children-from-sexual-exploitation> (last visited on Sept. 22, 2025).

⁴⁴⁷ Alva Lindholm & Ors., *The Investigation of Online Child Sexual Abuse Cases in Sweden: Organizational Challenges and the Need for Collaboration*, 11 NORDIC J. STUD. POLICING 1, 7 (2024).

prerecorded testimony and restricting aggressive cross-examination may help to shield child victims from re-traumatization, whereas Sweden's specialist cyber-forensic teams might boost India's ability to deal with AI-generated abuse and internet exploitation. Another example of how to improve child protection is the UK's measures against abuse by reliable adults. India can turn POCSO from a powerful law on paper to a fully functional, child-centred system protecting children totally in physical as well as internet settings.

X. FINDINGS AND CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

The POCSO Act 2012 study shows a stark contrast between its modern vision and how it is really implemented on the ground. POCSO is a child-centred, forward-looking rule meant to provide quick, sensitive justice on paper. However, its promise is frequently compromised by a slow legal system, stressed courts, and a lack of infrastructure, which postpone trials and help to maintain continuously low conviction rates.

In recent years, the rising number of documented cases has pointed to growing public awareness and readiness to pursue legal recourse. But in rural areas where community expectations are high, this apparent improvement obscures ongoing under-reporting brought on by stigma, shame, and patriarchal attitudes. Stricter penalties, including the death penalty for more serious crimes, raise still more issues; while meant to scare people off, they run the danger of strengthening silence in situations in which relatives of the offenders are the victims⁴⁴⁸.

Through protracted trials, aggressive treatment, and repeated questioning, the legal system itself regularly re-traumatizes victims, therefore greatly weakening many children. In addition, conflicting court rulings challenge and weaken the law's protective intent, particularly in

regards to consenting youngster interactions. The fact that digital risks are growing quickly—including sextortion, internet grooming, and the shocking rise in AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM)—also points out that technology advances faster than current laws allow⁴⁴⁹. The analysis shows that the institutional, technological, and societal constraints that prevent POCSO from being implemented effectively are the real problem, not how POCSO is framed.

XI. CONCLUSION

India's most important and valuable pieces of law for protecting children from sexual offences is the POCSO, Act, although its full promise is underutilized. Winged to social obstacles and institutional shortcomings forms going beyond the law itself are required to really enable the Act to be effective by improving the justice delivery system at every level. First, judicial and investigative capabilities need quick focus; hence, extra Fast Track Special Courts and specialized cyber-forensic divisions devoted to addressing online child exploitation, patterned after effective worldwide methods. Equally important is the application of trauma-informed techniques in the legal system: police officers, prosecutors, and judges should receive obligatory instruction to grasp the psychological impact. Although mental health specialists should be integrated across, from the point a complaint is filed to the rehabilitation phase, to guarantee consistent victim support, the influence of abuse should be so strong. simultaneously, reforms in digital governance—including changes to the IT Act and POCSO Act to clearly criminalize AI-generated or digitally produced content—are vital. Along with the use of tools like AI dashboards to track backlogs and enhance consistency in case management, child sexual abuse material (CSAM), Public awareness initiatives aimed at youngsters, families,

⁴⁴⁸ SANDEEP BHUPATIRAJU, DANIEL L. CHEN, ET.AL., AI AND INDIA'S JUDICIAL SYSTEM: LESSONS FROM POCSO, CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE LAW (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

⁴⁴⁹ SANDEEP BHUPATIRAJU, DANIEL L. CHEN, ET.AL., AI AND INDIA'S JUDICIAL SYSTEM: LESSONS FROM POCSO, CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE LAW (Cambridge University Press, 2025).



educators, and communities ultimately have to be increased in order to eradicate social stigma, inspire reporting, and establish a culture of vigilance. The POCSO Act can only realize its stated goal of safeguarding children in both physical and virtual environments via such multi-layered changes.

