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Legal Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Rajasthan: Evaluating the Effectiveness of the POCSO Act

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Abstract:-

Even though the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, was passed to establish a thorough, child-centred legal framework for prevention, prosecution, and protection, child sexual abuse is still one of the most common and underreported crimes in India. Focusing on the POCSO Act's implementation and enforcement, this article analyzes the efficacy of legal responses to child sexual abuse in Rajasthan. The reporting, investigation, and adjudication of offences against children in Rajasthan are greatly impacted by the complex socio-legal context that is influenced by long-standing patriarchal norms, rural-urban inequities, child marriage traditions, and deep-rooted societal stigma. This study takes a socio-legal and evaluational tack by sifting through secondary data collected from sources such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, rulings from POCSO courts and the Rajasthan High Court, and reports from both public and private organizations that work to safeguard children. Though the number of reported cases of child sexual abuse has gone up since POCSO was passed, which could mean that people are more aware of the problem, the results show that there is a paradoxical trend: the Act's goals are being undermined by problems like slow investigations, low conviction rates, procedural errors, and insufficient victim support systems. Rather than inadequate legislation, the article claims that systemic implementation difficulties and socio-cultural impediments hinder child-friendly justice in Rajasthan, limiting the effectiveness of POCSO. To fulfil the promise of POCSO and provide justice and protection for child victims, it closes by stressing the need for better institutional coordination, sensitizing players in the legal and police sectors, and community-level interventions.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse; POCSO Act, 2012; Rajasthan; Child Protection Laws; Socio-Legal Analysis; Criminal Justice System; Victim-Centric Justice

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1. Introduction

Public health and human-rights experts view child sexual abuse (CSA) as a pressing social issue that necessitates societal, institutional, and legal solutions because it is pervasive and has far-reaching effects on children's physical and mental health as well as on their ability to interact with others in their communities and across generations (Fernandes et al., 2021)[1]. In 2012, the Indian Parliament passed the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, a child-friendly law that criminalizes various sexual offenses against individuals under the age of eighteen and stipulates measures to lessen the impact of these crimes on these victims, such as in-camera trials, special courts, and medico-legal protections (The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012).

National statistics, however, paint a more nuanced picture: there has been an uptick in both the number of reported crimes against children and the number of cases processed under POCSO in the past few years (NCRB, Crime in India 2021)[2], a trend that experts see as indicative of both better detection and reporting systems and the persistence of child sexual victimization. Due to the state's large rural population, inconsistent institutional capacity for child protection, and long-standing social and cultural norms that discourage disclosure (such as child marriage in certain districts, shame, and family honor), as well as the fact that official state and police publications show an increase in child crimes, local advocacy groups highlight gaps in investigation, prosecution, and victim support, and Rajasthan Police/Rakshin report and Satyarthi Centre status reviews provide evidence of this.[3]

Has POCSO's legal framework resulted in effective, child-centric justice in Rajasthan, or are implementation, institutional, and socio-cultural failures undermining legislative intent? This is framed by the confluence of increasing recorded incidence,

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[1] Fernandes, G. S., Fernandes, M., Vaidya, N., De Souza, P., Plotnikova, E., Geddes, R., Holla, B., Sharma, E., Benegal, V., & Choudhry, V. (2021). *Prevalence of child maltreatment in India and its association with gender, urbanisation and policy: A rapid review and meta-analysis protocol*. BMJ Open, 11(8), e044983. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-044983

[2] POCSO Model Guidelines (Bachpan Bachao Andolan / child-rights organisations). (2021). *Model guidelines and SOPs for child-friendly procedures under POCSO* (PDF). https://bba.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/pocso-model-guidelines.pdf. BBA

[3] Rajasthan Police / Rakshin (2022). *Rakshin Book 2022* (Rajasthan Police Academy publication) — includes state statistics and summaries on crimes against children. Available from: https://home.rajasthan.gov.in/ (Rajasthan Police Academy publications)
Satyarthi, M. (2021). *Status of POCSO cases in India (2017–2019)*. Bachpan Bachao Andolan / Global March Against Child Labour. https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Status-of-POCSO-Cases-2017-2019.pdf

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procedural delays in prosecutions, and persistent under-reporting. Therefore, this paper analyzes official data, court outcomes, and secondary literature to conduct a socio-legal evaluation of POCSO's implementation in Rajasthan. The goal is to find measurable gaps between the Act's child-protection objectives and the reality of victim support during investigations, trials, and after the trial.

1.1. Conceptual and Legal Framework

- **Understanding Child Sexual Abuse**

Any sexual activity forced on a kid who is unable to provide informed permission is considered child sexual abuse (CSA), which is widely acknowledged as a serious infringement of children's basic rights to bodily integrity, growth, and dignity. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, defines CSA in Indian law. This act takes a child-centric approach by classifying all individuals under the age of eighteen as children, regardless of their gender or marital status. The Government of India (2012)[4] noted that POCSO recognizes the power imbalance between adults and minors by providing a separate legal framework that criminalises sexual acts against children without requiring proof of consent, in contrast to earlier sections of the Indian Penal Code that dealt with sexual offences through fragmented and adult-centric definitions.

International instruments reflecting similar understandings include the UNCRC, which states that states must protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse in all its forms and stresses that states must take legislative, administrative, and social actions to prevent these violations (United Nations, 1989)[5]. To reflect the wide variety of ways in which children can suffer sexual injury, the POCSO Act defines various categories of child sexual abuse that are legally actionable. The following are examples of sexual assault: penetrative and aggravated penetrative assault, non-penetrative assault, sexual harassment, and pornographic usage of children.

Recognizing that sexual violence against children encompasses more than just physical penetration, this categorization signifies a significant conceptual shift by including

[4] Government of India. (2012). *The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012*. Ministry of Law and Justice. https://www.indiacode.nic.in
[5] United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations General Assembly. https://www.ohchr.org

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acts that violate sexual autonomy, privacy, and psychological well-being. According to Chaudhry and Patel (2019)[6], academics have pointed out that this broad definition brings Indian law in line with international standards for child protection and allows the criminal justice system to address a broader range of abusive behaviors that were either ignored or not penalized enough before.

While this legislation covers a lot of ground, empirical research shows that enforcement isn't always consistent, especially when it comes to situations of online sexual exploitation or non-penetrative abuse (Kacker et al., 2017)[7]. Because socioeconomic and cultural factors greatly influence children's susceptibility to sexual abuse, it is crucial to do region-specific research. Children in states like Rajasthan are more likely to be victims of abuse and less likely to come forward because of issues including poverty, gender inequality, child marriage, caste systems, and strong traditions of family honor.

According to research, home or familiar areas are common locations for such abuse to take place, and the perpetrators are often people the victim knows, making it much more difficult to report and seek legal assistance (NCRB, 2021). The lack of child-friendly policing, insufficient legal education for parents and guardians, and rural-urban differences all play a role in the systemic under-reporting and postponement of justice. Thus, even though POCSO offers a solid legal and conceptual framework in theory, children in culturally and economically diverse areas like Rajasthan are still at a heightened risk of harm. This emphasizes the importance of looking at how the law interacts with society to determine the results of protection in practice.

- **Overview of the POCSO Act, 2012**

To establish child-friendly processes for investigation and trial and to establish a specific, gender-neutral legal framework that criminalizes a wide range of sexual offenses against individuals under the age of eighteen, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, was passed. A child is defined as any person below the age of eighteen. The defence of consent is explicitly removed in cases involving minors, and the Act unifies offenses that were previously scattered across the IPC and other statutes into a single

[6] Chaudhry, S., & Patel, T. (2019). Child sexual abuse in India: A review of the POCSO Act, 2012. *Journal of Indian Law and Society*, 10(1), 45–68.
[7] Kacker, L., Varadan, S., & Kumar, P. (2017). *Study on child abuse: India 2016*. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

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framework. These offenses include penetrative and non-penetrative sexual assault, sexual harassment, and the use of a child for pornographic purposes. In an effort to lessen the prevalence of secondary victimization and tackle evidentiary challenges specific to children, these structural elements indicate a change from laws focused on adults to a rights-based, protective legislative framework.

Important parts of POCSO include sections that define crimes clearly (Sections 3-9), require reporting (Section 19), address forensic and medical examinations (Sections 27-30), and protect against re-traumatizing procedures (Sections 26, 28), such as in-court exposure. In addition to allowing the use of video-recorded remarks as evidence, the Act specifies certain protocols for recording statements made by children. Notably, offences under POCSO require the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) by the police. The Act also establishes particular duties for the police, including the duty to ensure that statements and examinations are performed in a child-sensitive way (Section 21). The Act's effort to tailor the criminal justice system to the unique circumstances of juvenile victims is reflected in these procedural obligations.

Various procedural protections are necessary to make the law's child-friendly goal a reality. To safeguard the identity and dignity of the child, the Act and its accompanying model guidelines stress the following: a medical examination within 24 hours is ideal; statements should be recorded in a private, non-threatening setting by qualified personnel; aggressive cross-examination is forbidden; and trials should be conducted in camera. The significance of multi-agency coordination in reducing re-victimization and preserving medico-legal evidence has been emphasized in numerous model-guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) developed by child-rights organizations and states to aid in the implementation of these safeguards by medical practitioners, prosecutors, and police. Delays in medical examinations, a lack of child-friendly areas, and inadequate training of first responders are examples of recurrent difficulties that persist despite these explicit guidelines, according to implementation studies.

To avoid protracted litigation that can exacerbate victims' suffering, the Act mandates the creation of Special Courts to expedite the trial of POCSO offenses and envisions time-bound disposal as an essential component. To address these cases, states have

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established Sessions Courts, Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)[8], and exclusive POCSO courts; reporting mechanisms at the federal and state levels now monitor the quantity and efficiency of these courts. However, the promise of quick justice is undermined by pendency, which is a major worry.

Heavy caseloads, backlogs in forensic processing, and an uneven distribution of functional special courts throughout states have all been uncovered by monitoring reports and non-governmental organizations. Efforts to improve disposal rates have been indicated by recent government data and policy initiatives, such as the establishment of additional FTSCs. However, advocates warn that increasing the number of courts without also increasing capacity building in areas such as trained prosecutors, judges, and forensic labs will not eliminate delays.

A number of major modifications were adopted by the POCSO (Amendment) Act, 2019, to close legal loopholes and boost deterrence in response to public uproar and changing patterns of abuse, such as the growing visibility of child pornography and online sexual exploitation. The 2019 revisions made many changes, including raising the minimum and maximum prison terms for some crimes, making it more difficult to get out of prison for repeat offenders, and making it illegal to exploit children in pornographic works, which carries with it harsher penalties. The Amendment brought legislative consequences in line with a more punishing policy position by clarifying sentences for aggravated assault and providing for harsher punishments in cases when crimes result in death or grievous injury. While these changes show that lawmakers are responding to new harms, critics point out that harsher punishments won't deter crime unless there are also improvements in the ways in which crimes are detected, investigated, and convicted. They also express worry about how extremely high penalties will affect rehabilitation, sentencing proportionality, and plea bargaining.

By integrating substantive criminalization, child-friendly procedural protection, and institutional tools for swift trials, the POCSO Act and its 2019 modification create a strong legal framework on paper. Still, a common thread emerges from reviews and reports on implementation: laws can't ensure child-centred justice on their own; there needs to be

[8] Ministry of Law and Justice. (2021). *Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs) scheme: Status report*. Government of India.

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ongoing capacity building in the judicial, medical, and social welfare systems as well as in the community at large to ensure that reporting, evidence-preservation, and victim support all work as intended. In places like Rajasthan, where enforcement is further complicated by socio-cultural obstacles and infrastructure constraints, the effectiveness of POCSO is largely dependent on this disparity between the promise of the statute and its actual implementation.

2. Objectives

- To analyze patterns in the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of child sexual offences in Rajasthan following the implementation of POCSO.
- To assess how the various Rajasthani institutions (police, special courts, child welfare authorities, and victim assistance) have put POCSO into practice.
- POCSO's ability to provide child-centred justice is hindered by socio-cultural and procedural obstacles.
- Suggesting workable changes at the community, institutional, and legislative levels to improve POCSO implementation in Rajasthan

3. Research Questions

- What are the trends in reporting and case registration under POCSO in Rajasthan since 2012, and how have they changed?
- How well do the results of investigations, the number of charges filed, the length of trials, and the percentage of convictions in Rajasthan represent the goals of POCSO in terms of protecting children?
- The most significant barriers to efficient implementation of POCSO in Rajasthan include socio-cultural reasons such as stigma, child marriage, and family pressure, as well as systemic difficulties such as police training, court delays, and a lack of victim assistance.
- Which specific reforms, whether they be administrative, legal, or community-based, would help child victims in Rajasthan get the help they need and increase their access to justice the most?

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

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- **Child Sexual Abuse in Rajasthan: Trends and Patterns**

Satyarthi (2023) concluded that it appears that there are systemic issues with investigation quality, evidentiary substantiation, and trial efficiency rather than statutory deficiency, as the conviction rates under POCSO in Rajasthan remain relatively low, despite increased registration (Satyarthi, 2023)[9].

As per **(NCRB, 2016;[10] NCRB, 2021;[11] NCRB, 2022)[12],** child sexual abuse (CSA) has become an important and ongoing criminal category in Rajasthan, according to government statistics. This reflects both national trends and vulnerabilities specific to the region. The majority of crimes committed against children in the state are listed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, according to data published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) (NCRB, 2016; NCRB, 2021; NCRB, 2022). The increase in registered cases may be a result of more people being aware of and willing to report sexual offences against children after POCSO was passed.

Kacker et al. (2017);[13] iProbono, (2022)[14] said that, however, experts warn that these numbers don't necessarily mean that the incidence of these crimes has increased; rather, they reflect a complex interaction between the increased visibility of these crimes in the legal system, better classification of these crimes, and the persistence of abuse (Kacker et al., 2017; iProbono, 2022). There has been a noticeable change in the recording and prosecution of child sexual offences in Rajasthan after the implementation of POCSO in 2012.

As per **NCRB, (2021),** the unequal geography of CSA reporting in Rajasthan is further highlighted by variances by district and by rural-urban status. There is a significant disparity in the number of instances reported by rural and tribal districts compared to districts with

[9] Satyarthi, M. (2023). *Paper on pendency of POCSO cases and disposal trends* (report). Bachpan Bachao Andolan. https://satyarthi.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Paper-on-Pendency-of-POCSO-Cases_Jan23.pdf. Satyarthi
[10] National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). (2016). *Crime in India 2015: Crimes against children*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
[11] National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). (2021). *Crime in India 2020: Crimes against children*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
[12] National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). (2022). *Crime in India 2021: Crimes against children*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. https://ncrb.gov.in
[13] Kacker, L., Varadan, S., & Kumar, P. (2017). *Study on child abuse: India 2016*. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.
[14] iProbono. (2022). As child sex abuse cases rise, NCRB must address data gaps. *iProbono India*. https://i-probono.in

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higher levels of urbanization and better access to judicial and police infrastructure (NCRB, 2021).

As per **NCRB (2019)[15],** before POCSO, many cases of child sexual abuse were either covered up by the Indian Penal Code's broad provisions or went unreported because of stigma and unclear procedures. The number of reported incidents of sexual assault, especially those falling into the categories of penetrative and aggravated penetrative assault, has been steadily increasing since 2012, when a specific statute was passed requiring mandatory reporting (NCRB, 2019).

Bhattacharya (2018)[16] revealed that this discrepancy, according to researchers, does not indicate a lesser frequency in rural areas; rather, it draws attention to systemic obstacles, such as a lack of knowledge about the law among guardians, social pressure within small communities, and limited access to police units that are child-friendly (Bhattacharya, 2018). Because of the prevalence of informal power structures and caste hierarchies in rural Rajasthan, families may be afraid of social exclusion or reprisal if they come out to report abuse. This contributes to the high rate of underreporting in this area. Victims in Rajasthan follow national trends in terms of age and gender.

According to **NCRB (2022)** data, most victims are girls between the ages of 12 and 16, and while there has been a small uptick in incidents involving boys in recent years, the bulk of complainants are girls (NCRB, 2022). **Chaudhry & Patel (2019)[17]** analysed that this pattern not as less victimization of boys but as a crack in the long-established veil of male child sexual assault (Chaudhry & Patel, 2019). youngsters under the age of twelve, in particular, are underrepresented in official statistics. This could be because caregivers are more likely to bury their allegations or because these youngsters lack the language skills to express the abuse they have experienced. According to government statistics and independent studies **(Kacker et al., 2017; NCRB, 2021),** a common finding is that the youngster knows who committed the crime. A large number of CSA instances in Rajasthan, like in the rest of India,

[15] National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). (2019). *Crime in India 2018: Crimes against children*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
[16] Bhattacharya, S. (2018). Child sexual abuse in India: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 27(6), 698–714. https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1477222
[17] Chaudhry, S., & Patel, T. (2019). Child sexual abuse in India: A review of the POCSO Act, 2012. *Journal of Indian Law and Society*, 10(1), 45–68.

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include those in trusted positions, such as family, neighbors, instructors, or other members of the immediate family (Kacker et al., 2017; NCRB, 2021).

Baxi (2014) reviewed that because of the closeness of the relationships involved, reporting and prosecution can be challenging, since families may value social cohesion, economic dependence, or perceived honor more than seeking legal recourse. Conviction results and the POCSO's protective intent are both undermined when courts deal with hostile witnesses and dropped complaints[18].

UNICEF India (2020)[19] asserted that the underlying issue of underreporting, which stems from structural disparities and socio-cultural norms, is at the heart of all these trends. There are strong barriers to disclosure, especially for girls, in Rajasthan due to patriarchal attitudes, the normalization of child maltreatment, child marriage customs, and the stigma associated with sexual victimization. Another reason families don't use formal legal processes is because they are afraid of the police, distrust institutions, and worry about their child's future marriage possibilities. Consequently, the NCRB data only paint a partial picture of the extent of sexual abuse of children in the state, even if they give an important empirical baseline for trend analysis. Statistical trends and socio-cultural circumstances must be interpreted together to understand CSA in Rajasthan. This underscores the necessity for legislative remedies that go beyond penal frameworks and incorporate victim-centered support systems, community sensitization, and prevention efforts (UNICEF India, 2020).

5. METHODOLOGY

The success of Rajasthan's Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, is assessed in this study, which takes a socio-legal method to research. Examining both the theoretical and practical aspects of POCSO within their respective social and institutional settings, the paper integrates doctrinal and empirical legal analysis. By taking this tack, we can better see where child safety laws fall short of actual practice[20]. To analyze trends in reporting, investigation, prosecution, and conviction of POCSO cases, the research mainly

[18] Baxi, U. (2014). *The future of human rights* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
[19] UNICEF India. (2020). *Child protection in India: Situational analysis*. UNICEF India Country Office.
[20] Child Safety at Work (analysis). (2021). *Introduction of death penalty and other enhanced punishments: the 2019 POCSO amendment explained*. https://childsafetyatwork.org/introduction-of-death-penalty-and-other-enhanced-punishments-the-2019-pocso-amendment-explained/

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uses secondary data sources, such as reports from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), records from the Rajasthan Police, and data from the state Home Department.

Furthermore, in order to evaluate sentencing methods, evidentiary standards, and statutory interpretation, court decisions of the Rajasthan High Court and the Rajasthan POCSO Special Courts are examined. To round out official statistics, reports from child rights organizations and NGOs offer qualitative insights into victim support systems, implementation hurdles, and other related topics. Three approaches are used to carry out the analysis: first, a doctrinal study of the POCSO Act and its revisions; second, a statistical trend study of case data; and third, case studies of specific court decisions to draw attention to evidentiary and procedural concerns. A balanced and credible evaluation of POCSO implementation in Rajasthan is achieved through the triangulation of legal, statistical, judicial, and non-governmental organization (NGO) sources. The study is hampered by underreporting, restricted access to trial-level data, and the absence of primary fieldwork.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

6.1. Implementation of the POCSO Act in Rajasthan (Short Version)

- **Institutional Mechanisms**

Special Public Prosecutors, Special Juvenile Police Units, Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), and Special POCSO Courts are the pillars upon which the POCSO Act rests in the Indian state of Rajasthan. To deal with cases that are still pending, the state has turned the Sessions Courts into Special Courts and set up POCSO courts exclusively under the Fast Track Special Courts program. The effectiveness of time-bound trials is limited since many courts still handle mixed caseloads, even if this has enhanced formal access to justice (NCRB, 2022; Satyarthi, 2023)[21][22].

Uneven training and manpower shortages—especially in rural districts—affect consistent implementation of the police's responsibilities regarding FIR registration, investigation, and coordination with CWCs (UNICEF India, 2020). When it comes to

[21] National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). (2022). *Crime in India 2021: Crimes against children*. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
[22] Satyarthi, M. (2023). *Pendency and disposal of POCSO cases in India: A status report*. Bachpan Bachao Andolan. https://satyarthi.org.in
The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012. (2012). Government of India. https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2079/1/AA2012-32.pdf. India Code

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prosecuting and protecting children, CWCs and Special Public Prosecutors are indispensable. However, their work is frequently hindered by heavy caseloads and a lack of specialized training (Kacker et al., 2017).

- **Procedural Challenges**

There are still major procedural hurdles in implementing POCSO in Rajasthan, even if there are legal protections. The goal of swift justice is undermined by the persistence of investigation and trial delays caused by forensic backlogs, understaffed courts, and numerous adjournments (NCRB, 2022). Victims may experience procedural stress and repetitive questioning when medical examinations and statements are recorded in a way that does not adhere to child-friendly standards (NCPCR, 2021)[23]. Children, particularly in instances involving known perpetrators, are susceptible to intimidation and peer pressure due to the lack of systematic victim protection and witness support systems. The fragmented reactions caused by a lack of coordination among courts, medical authorities, CWCs, and police further undermine the efficiency of the child-centric framework that the POCSO Act aimed to establish.

- **Judicial Responses and Case Law Analysis (Short)**

The Rajasthani judiciary has shown a careful but inconsistent use of child-centric concepts in its answers to POCSO cases. Judgments from the Rajasthan High Court and the POCSO Special Courts show that the conviction rate is still low and that acquittals are common due to problems with the evidence, uncooperative witnesses, and investigative mistakes. While determining age sometimes relies on documented evidence like school records, which can be difficult in rural circumstances, courts have generally taken a stringent statutory view of consent, reiterating that a minor's consent is legally immaterial under POCSO. The 2019 modifications have led to a shift in sentencing policies towards harsher punishments for more serious offences, although judges' discretion is still an issue. While courts do recognize POCSO's protective objective, child-friendly jurisprudence is not consistently implemented.

- **Evaluating the Effectiveness of the POCSO Act in Rajasthan (Short)**

[23] National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). (2021). *Assessment of implementation of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012*. Government of India.

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According to the NCRB, the number of reports of child sexual abuse in Rajasthan has been continuously increasing since the implementation of the POCSO Act. There are worries regarding the Act's deterrent effect because, despite increased reporting, there has not been a commensurate improvement in conviction rates or trial efficiency. Despite the fact that the law is based on a victim-centric framework, its effectiveness is hindered by real-life issues such as delays, insufficient investigation, and weak support services. Systemic and socio-cultural barriers, rather than statutory shortcomings, appear to be the root cause of the persistent gap between legal aim and actual outcomes in Rajasthan.

- **Socio-Cultural and Structural Challenges**

To a large extent, the success or failure of POCSO in Rajasthan depends on sociocultural variables. Many victims are reluctant to come forward, especially when the perpetrator is someone they know, due to patriarchal traditions, the stigma associated with sexual victimization, and family-based suppression of complaints. Further complicating matters and reducing children's access to formal legal systems are practices like child marriage, rural vulnerabilities, and entrenched caste structures. Underreporting and delayed intervention persist due to parents' and children's fear of social exclusion, lack of legal knowledge, and fear of retaliation.

6.1. Results and Findings

The study finds that after the POCSO Act was passed, there has been an uptick in reports of child sexual abuse in Rajasthan. However, this uptick in reporting does not seem to have resulted in any better justice being served. The child-centric goals of the Act are still being undermined by things like lack of victim support services, slow procedures, weak investigations, and flawed evidence. The results show that the law isn't to blame for POCSO's lack of success in Rajasthan; rather, systemic implementation difficulties and socio-cultural impediments are to blame.

6.2. Discussion and Recommendations and Policy Suggestions

Reforms should be implemented with an emphasis on enhancing the quality of investigations, the efficacy of prosecutors, and inter-agency coordination in order to strengthen the implementation of POCSO in Rajasthan. To guarantee procedures that are child-friendly, it is vital that medical staff, judges, and prosecutors receive trauma-informed training regularly.

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Rather than relying on ad hoc interventions from non-governmental organizations, victim support services such as counselling, rehabilitation, and witness protection should be institutionalized. To close the gap between legal requirements and social realities, it is essential to implement community awareness programs, education campaigns in schools, more transparent statistics, and ongoing monitoring of POCSO instances.

7. Conclusion

Despite the POCSO Act's strong legal structure, this article shows that implementation gaps, procedural delays, and socio-cultural impediments limit the Act's effectiveness in Rajasthan when it comes to child sexual abuse. There needs to be systemic transformation beyond legal measures since increased reporting has not always resulted in prompt justice or deterrence. Legal enforcement, institutional capacity-building, and community-level initiatives must be integrated in order to address the wider difficulties in India's child protection framework, as shown in the Rajasthan example. To better evaluate the effect of POCSO on child protection results, future studies should combine comparison analysis at the state level with primary fieldwork.

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