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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & REVIEWS

journal homepage: www.ijmrr.online/index.php/home

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES (POCSO) ACT IN REFERENCE TO CHILD ABUSE CASES IN INDIA: A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS

Allen Graham ¹ Dr. Azim Khan ²

¹Research Scholar, Faculty of Law, Kalinga University, Raipur Chhattisgarh.

²Professor, Department of Law, Kalinga University, Raipur Chhattisgarh

How to Cite the Article: Allen Graham & Azim Khan (2026). Effectiveness Of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act in Reference to Child Abuse Cases in India: A Socio-Legal Analysis. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(10), 18-22.



<https://doi.org/10.56815/ijmrr.v5i10.2026.18-22>

Keywords	Abstract
POCSO Act, Child Sexual Abuse, Legal Awareness, Child Protection, Reporting Intention, Institutional Effectiveness	The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 represents a significant legislative initiative for safeguarding children against sexual abuse in India. This research paper examines the statutory framework, implementation challenges, legal awareness, institutional trust, and reporting intentions associated with the Act. The research adopts a socio-legal approach integrating doctrinal analysis with empirical findings obtained from 80 mothers having children below twelve years of age in Karattupalayam, Tiruchengode, Tamil Nadu. Findings indicate that general awareness of POCSO exists among most surveyed respondents, although knowledge of mandatory reporting, Special Courts, and child-friendly procedures remains uneven. Educational attainment is associated with legal awareness, while a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.9821$) is reported between awareness and stated reporting intention. Institutional trust is associated with perceptions of implementation effectiveness. Nevertheless, localized findings cannot establish the nationwide effectiveness of the legislation. The paper recommends strengthening legal literacy, accessible reporting procedures, institutional coordination, and victim-centred justice. Effective child protection requires comprehensive legislative safeguards supported by community participation, administrative accountability, and institutional mechanisms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse constitutes a serious violation of fundamental human rights, dignity, personal security, and constitutional protection. In India, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 establishes a specialized legal framework protecting children below eighteen years from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and exploitation.



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The legislation incorporates gender-neutral protection, mandatory reporting, confidentiality, child-friendly investigation procedures, and Special Courts (Government of India, 2012). However, legislative protection does not automatically guarantee effective implementation.

Mathews and Collin-Vézina (2019) emphasize the importance of understanding child sexual abuse through comprehensive legal and conceptual frameworks. Social stigma, insufficient awareness, institutional limitations, and fear of reporting can obstruct access to justice.

The present study examines the effectiveness of POCSO through legal provisions and localized empirical evidence concerning parental awareness, institutional trust, and reporting intentions.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to examine the legislative framework of the POCSO Act, assess legal awareness among selected mothers, investigate the relationship between awareness and reporting intention, identify perceived implementation barriers, and recommend improvements in child-protection mechanisms.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employs a descriptive, analytical, and socio-legal approach. Doctrinal analysis examines legislation, constitutional safeguards, judicial decisions, and published research.

The empirical component comprises a questionnaire-based survey involving 80 mothers having children below twelve years of age residing in Karattupalayam, Tiruchengode, Tamil Nadu. Respondents were selected through convenience sampling.

The analysis examines awareness, reporting intentions, institutional trust, and perceived implementation effectiveness. Statistical relationships are interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. The empirical findings cannot be generalized to India as a whole.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION

The POCSO Act establishes specific sexual offences and child-sensitive procedures. Sections 19 and 24–28 address reporting and investigative safeguards, while Sections 33 and 35 provide protections concerning Special Courts and trial procedures.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act, 2019 strengthened penalties for certain offences. Judicial interpretation has also supported the protective purpose of the legislation.

In *Independent Thought v. Union of India* (2017), the Supreme Court emphasized the bodily integrity and welfare of minor girls. Similarly, *Attorney General for India v. Satish* (2022) reinforced purposive interpretation of child-protection provisions.

Nevertheless, investigation delays, limited institutional resources, inadequate counselling, and social pressures remain significant implementation concerns.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey indicates that general recognition of the POCSO Act exists among most respondents, but detailed knowledge of procedural safeguards is comparatively limited. Educational attainment was statistically associated with awareness.



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The thesis reports a strong positive correlation between awareness and stated reporting intention ($r = 0.9821$). However, stated willingness to report should not be interpreted as verified reporting behaviour.

Respondents expressed differing perceptions concerning police responsiveness, judicial procedures, confidentiality, and institutional effectiveness. These perceptions do not directly measure actual institutional performance.

Table 1. Summary of Major Empirical Findings on POCSO Awareness and Implementation

Research Dimension	Major Finding	Interpretation
Sample characteristics	80 mothers from Karattupalayam	Localized empirical evidence
General legal awareness	Majority recognized POCSO	Basic awareness exists
Procedural knowledge	Uneven understanding	Greater legal literacy required
Education and awareness	Statistical association identified	Education-related differences
Awareness and reporting intention	Pearson $r = 0.9821$	Strong positive association
Institutional trust	Associated with perceived implementation gaps	Institutional confidence matters
Implementation assessment	Based on respondent perceptions	Actual performance not established

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF POCSO EFFECTIVENESS



Figure 1. Integrated Socio-Legal Framework for Child Protection under the POCSO Act



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7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening POCSO implementation requires community-based awareness programmes explaining reporting responsibilities, Special Courts, confidentiality, and child-friendly procedures. Schools, local authorities, legal services institutions, and child-protection agencies should promote accessible legal information.

Police and judicial personnel require continuing child-sensitive training, while improved institutional coordination can support timely investigation, counselling, and rehabilitation.

Regular evaluations using official case-processing statistics, victim-support indicators, and institutional performance measures are essential for assessing actual effectiveness.

8. CONCLUSION

The POCSO Act, 2012 provides an important legal foundation for protecting children against sexual offences in India. The present study demonstrates that awareness among selected mothers is positively associated with stated reporting intention, while institutional perceptions are associated with trust.

However, community awareness alone cannot establish legislative effectiveness. Effective child protection requires procedural knowledge, accessible institutions, coordinated enforcement, and victim-centred support. Future investigations should employ larger representative samples alongside verified institutional data to assess implementation outcomes more comprehensively.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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SOURCES OF FUNDING

The authors received no financial aid to support for the research.

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