

Socio Legal Implications of Digital Media in Child Safety: Perceptions, Awareness, and Reporting Under Posco 2012

Roshan Kumar Gupta¹, Dr. Khoda Meena²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Legal Studies, Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh, India

²Research Supervisor, Department of Legal Studies, Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Abstract: *There are new possibilities for learning and communication thanks to the fast growth of digital media, but there are also significant dangers of sexual exploitation and abuse for children when they are online. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 is an important piece of legislation in India that aims to protect children from sexual abuse. However, in this digital age, the law will only be effective if there is a combination of strong legislation, public awareness, institutional readiness, and technical responsibility. By analyzing public opinions, levels of awareness, and reporting behavior in incidents of online abuse, this article investigates the socio-legal ramifications of digital media on child protection. Examining the persistence of social stigma, fear, inadequate digital literacy, and institutional constraints as they pertain to the execution of child protection legislation, this study takes a doctrinal and socio-legal stance by consulting statutes, court decisions, scholarly articles, and policy reports. The results show that cultural and procedural hurdles are the main causes of under-reporting of online crimes, and that deficits in cyber knowledge make it harder for investigators and prosecutors to cope with these cases. Strong legal enforcement, social sensitization, institutional reform, and more accountability of digital platforms are all necessary for child protection in the digital era, according to the paper's conclusions. This study adds to current discussions about child safety and provides concrete suggestions for how India might better respond to online threats against children by placing the POCSO Act within the larger socio-digital environment.*

Keywords: Child Safety, Digital Media, POCSO Act 2012, Online Child Sexual Abuse, Socio-Legal Implications, Reporting Behaviour, Child Protection Laws, Digital Awareness,

1. Introduction

In today's world, the social and developmental landscape of kids has been greatly altered by digital media. These days, kids use digital platforms for everything from learning to playing, and they start interacting with technology at a young age. Although these platforms present great potential for education and community building, they have also introduced many new dangers. Children are more at risk in cyberspace due to the proliferation of child sexual abuse materials, cyber grooming, hazardous content, and online sexual exploitation. Traditional legislative processes are insufficient to handle the issue of child protection in India due to the exponential growth of smartphone and internet connectivity in both urban and rural areas. On the contrary, it has grown into a complex issue involving several domains, including governance, society, technology, and law.

An important step in enhancing India's legal framework against child sexual abuse was the passage of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 in 2012. New victim-centered practices, harsher penalties, and processes tailored to children were all part of the Act. It is not enough for these laws to just have legislative provisions; their efficacy in this digital age will also depend on how they adapt to the ever-changing technology landscape. Due to the global nature of online crimes, the anonymity of their offenders, and the prevalence of digital evidence, their investigation and prosecution are notoriously difficult. Institutional constraints, such as a lack of cyber knowledge within law enforcement and lengthy procedural delays, also undermine the law's intended protective purpose.

The results of child protection measures are greatly influenced by social variables, in addition to legal and bureaucratic hurdles. Parents and educators still lack digital literacy, there is deep-seated shame, and people are sceptical of formal judicial systems, all of which make it difficult for victims to disclose online abuse. Victims' relatives often choose not to speak out for fear of retaliation, which leads to underreporting of crimes and gives offenders a pass. In light of this, the current research looks at the ways in which digital media affects child safety via the interrelated aspects of awareness, reporting behavior, and perception. This paper examines the POCSO Act in the larger socio-digital context and presents the case for a comprehensive strategy to safeguard children in the digital age. This strategy should incorporate stringent legal enforcement, social sensitization, and technological accountability.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

- 1) Examine the socio-legal challenges posed by digital media to child safety in India.
- 2) Analyse public perceptions and awareness regarding online child sexual abuse and the POCSO Act, 2012.
- 3) Evaluate how digital platforms affect reporting behaviour of victims and guardians.
- 4) Assess the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional mechanisms in addressing online offences against children.
- 5) Suggest reforms to strengthen child protection in the digital age.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study is important because it takes a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to the problem of child safety in the digital age by combining legal analysis with sociological understanding and principles of digital governance. This article places the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 into its larger social and technological context, rather than focusing on statutory interpretation or court outcomes, as is typical of conventional legal research. This study provides a more accurate picture of the law's social effect by looking at how commonplace digital activities, public perceptions, cultural stigma, and knowledge all play a role in the reporting and prosecution of crimes committed against minors. It makes a significant contribution to the current policy conversations around child protection and cyber safety by arguing for policies that focus on prevention, education, and victims rather than punishment. In addition, policymakers aiming to update child protection laws, teachers aiming to make classrooms safer places to learn, and child protection organizations aiming to fortify institutional reactions to cyberbullying can all benefit greatly from the study's findings. By doing so, the study contributes to the field of socio-legal studies and provides useful information for those who are working to safeguard children's rights and safety in an ever-growing digital environment.

1.3. Scope of the Study

This research focuses on the social and legal environment in India, specifically on how the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 deals with crimes committed via the internet. The research takes a doctrinal and analytical approach, based on statutory interpretation, judicial decisions, academic literature, and pertinent policy documents, rather than doing empirical fieldwork or quantitative data analysis. In instances of sexual abuse of children occurring online, this method permits a targeted investigation of the interplay between societal realities and legal standards. The study aims to provide light on how child protection laws actually work by focusing on three key areas: public knowledge, social perception, and reporting behavior. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the stigma, institutional limitations, and digital literacy gaps that are socio-legal obstacles to the efficient application of POCSO in the digital arena by focusing on these factors. The major goal of this research is to evaluate societal and legal responses to digital threats to children, not technological detection of such threats. Consequently, the study does not cover technical aspects of cyber forensics, software mechanisms, or investigative technologies. The human, legal, and institutional aspects of digital kid safety are clearly defined within this scope, which guarantees in-depth analysis without losing sight of the big picture.

2. Literature Review

KS (2021) carried out an analysis of the sexual abuse legislation in India, focusing on the safeguards afforded to children and women. The research looked at how rape laws have changed over time and how some changes have sought to improve victim rights and procedural protections. The author did note, however, that public awareness was low,

enforcement agencies were insensitive, and institutional delays meant that child protection laws were not consistently put into practice, even though they had progressive legislative provisions. Secondary victimization, which occurs frequently during the legal process and discourages victims, especially youngsters, from reporting crimes and undermines their faith in the judicial system, according to the research. By highlighting the necessity for victim-centric reforms within the larger framework of child protection, this work substantially advanced our knowledge of the chasm that exists between statutory intent and social reality.

Chattoraj (2025) looked explored the interplay of educational institutions, healthcare providers, social services, and legal institutions in India to address instances of child abuse via the prism of multidisciplinary response mechanisms for child protection. Despite India's robust legislative and policy framework, the study indicated that various stakeholders still lacked cohesive coordination. The author contended that counsellors, child welfare committees, police, and courts should all work together in an integrated system to ensure the safety of children. According to the study's findings, victims frequently had inadequate psychological assistance and delayed recovery due to a lack of a synchronized reaction. In order to reinforce the protective environment that the POCSO Act aims to create, Chattoraj's work highlighted the significance of institutional cooperation.

Zhang and Chawla (2022) investigated the mandatory reporting laws of China and India from a socio-legal perspective, looking specifically at how the two countries' legislative decisions revealed their contrasting views on child safety. In contrast to China's centralised state-driven model, the authors looked at how the POCSO Act in India enforced reporting requirements on certain groups of people. According to their research, individuals in India frequently lacked legal knowledge and institutional support due to the heavy burden that social actors like teachers, doctors, and guardians bore. The authors came to the conclusion that the law would go unused unless mandated reporters received proper training and protection. By showing how the structure of laws affected reporting habits and the results of enforcement, this comparative viewpoint improved the conversation around child protection.

Sadiq and Rai (2020) examined plans for the protection and rehabilitation of sexually abused children in accordance with the POCSO Act. Their research looked at how well current welfare and judicial systems deal with victims' urgent needs for protection as well as their rehabilitation in the long run. Although the Act established child-friendly procedures and support services, the authors noted that there were still gaps in its implementation caused by insufficient infrastructure and unequal access to rehabilitation and counselling centers. Findings from the research demonstrated that victims of sexual abuse needed ongoing social and psychological care in order to rehabilitate, something that the judicial system could not provide. Their research helped clarify that protecting children is the state's and the community's social and therapeutic duty in addition to its legal one.

Jakhmola (2021), analyzed the POCSO Act, 2012 in depth for a doctoral thesis, looking for loopholes in the law and

practical obstacles. The study looked at how institutional failures, problems with evidence, and procedural impediments impacted the successful prosecution of instances involving sexual abuse of children. Inconsistencies in investigations, a lack of specialized training among police personnel, and delays in trial processes frequently hampered justice delivery, the author observed, despite the Act's strong penal framework. The research went on to say that the current regulatory framework was inadequate in dealing with new types of abuse, especially those made possible by digital platforms. To keep up with the ever-evolving social and technological landscape, Jakhmola's writings have long advocated for ongoing legal change in response to the law's inadequacies.

3. Research Methodology

To investigate the social and legal effects of digital media on child safety in light of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, this section describes the study's methodology, including the research strategy, data sources, and analytical methods.

3.1 Research Design

This study examines child protection laws in India in the context of fast digital transition. It is based on a doctrinal and socio-legal research design that has been chosen with care to allow for a comprehensive evaluation. This analytical approach allows the research to incorporate the larger social factors that impact the implementation of these laws, moving beyond a narrow review of statutory provisions and court interpretations. This study takes a doctrinal approach to examine the intent of the law, the principles of law, and the way the courts have applied the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012; a socio-legal approach examines the ways in which public opinion, cultural attitudes, and common digital practices impact the outcome of legal proceedings. Instead of employing numerical data or statistical generalizations, the research is qualitative and focuses on institutional performance, policy frameworks, and legal reasoning. This method sheds light on the necessity for changes that are socially relevant and legally sound by analyzing the interplay between society, technology, and the law. It offers a detailed knowledge of the difficulties in applying child safety laws in the digital era.

3.2 Nature of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive and analytical study is to evaluate how well the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 deals with new types of child sexual abuse that occur on the internet. The research aims to better understand how these legal principles function within the complicated reality of contemporary society, rather than confining itself to a merely doctrinal assessment of legislative provisions. Victims and their families' propensity to disclose online crimes is examined in depth in relation to cultural stigma, societal views, and different degrees of digital awareness. The study also looks at how institutional mechanisms like the courts, child welfare organizations, and law enforcement play a part in determining how these instances turn out. Findings from this study fill in the gaps

between theoretical and practical knowledge of the law, especially as it pertains to safeguarding minors from online predators, by placing legal regulations in their larger social and institutional framework.

3.3 Sources of Data

This study relies totally on secondary sources of data, such as:

- Legal documents, such as the Prevention of Child Sexual Offenses Act of 2012 and applicable sections of the Information Technology Act of 2000.
- Child protection and cyber legislation as interpreted by the courts.
- Works of literature, scholarly publications, and journals.
- Papers published by regulatory agencies and child protection organizations, as well as studies and policy papers produced by the government.

The study's legal and socio-institutional groundwork is supplied by these sources.

3.4 Method of Analysis

In order to better understand the legislative intent, statutory interpretation, and judicial reasoning around child protection in the digital domain, a doctrinal approach to legal analysis has been utilized. An additional viewpoint, the socio-legal one, assesses the impact of cultural stigma, levels of digital literacy, and social attitudes on the actual implementation of child protection legislation. By combining the two methods, we may see the big picture of the difference between theoretical and practical legal principles.

3.5 Limitations of the Methodology

No primary data collection has been carried out as per the study's specified requirement. There will be no use of statistical methods, fieldwork, interviews, or surveys in this study. While this limits the scope for empirical generalisation, the doctrinal and analytical framework ensures depth of legal reasoning and conceptual clarity. The findings of the study are therefore based on documented legal sources and existing scholarly discourse

4. Socio-Legal Implications of Digital Media in Child Safety

By making abuse possible in virtual spaces that are not subject to physical oversight or quick social regulation, digital media has radically changed the conventional wisdom about the need of protecting children. Digital exploitation differs from more traditional types of abuse in that it frequently occurs in hidden online environments, making it harder for authorities to uncover. Offenders can hide their identities online, operate across jurisdictions, and prey on children without fear of instant repercussions because of the anonymity the internet provides. Further discouraging admission and prompt reporting is the fact that victims often endure profound psychological suffering, terror, and humiliation. This forces the judicial system to adapt to a changing technology environment where traditional methods of investigation and evidence are frequently inadequate.

The legal system is confronted with a significant structural issue, which has grave ramifications. Many law enforcement organizations still face challenges due to a lack of technological capability, despite the fact that investigating online crimes necessitates specialised cyber units, skilled staff, and rapid access to digital evidence. Problems with jurisdiction cause delays in justice and less accountability when data servers and digital platforms are situated outside of a country's borders. Social views are just as formidable as these legal obstacles when it comes to protecting children. Silence, rather than legal action, is the result in many communities due to fears of social disgrace, public scrutiny, and family honor. For fear of repercussions to their child's reputation or mental health, parents frequently refrain from reporting incidents of cyberbullying.

The fact that youngsters are more susceptible to harm in online environments is also crucial. Kids are more likely to be groomed, manipulated, or exploited due to increased screen time, unfettered social media access, and lack of knowledge about online dangers. Kids may not know how to spot dangerous online interactions or where to turn for assistance if they aren't taught digital literacy skills. It is clear from these interrelated legal, social, and technological considerations that tougher regulations will not be enough to protect children in the digital era. Rather, it calls for a more systemic shift toward social awareness and the modernization of institutions so that children can speak out without fear in a safe space.

Table 1: Socio-Legal Implications of Digital Media on Child Safety

Dimension	Nature of the Challenge	Implications for Child Protection
Legal System	Jurisdictional complexities, lack of cyber-trained personnel, delays in digital evidence collection	Weakens investigation and prosecution of online child abuse cases
Institutional Capacity	Limited technological infrastructure and coordination among agencies	Reduces effectiveness of law enforcement and child protection mechanisms
Social Perceptions	Stigma, fear of social dishonour, reluctance to report	Leads to under-reporting and continued victimisation
Child Vulnerability	Increased unsupervised online activity and lack of digital awareness	Heightens exposure to grooming and exploitation
Psychological Impact	Fear, shame, and trauma among victims	Discourages disclosure and delays access to justice
Technological Environment	Anonymity of offenders and cross-border platforms	Complicates accountability and enforcement of child protection laws

5. Findings

Based on doctrinal and literature-based analysis, the study arrives at the following findings:

- 1) Although internet access has expanded, there is still a lack of awareness regarding the sexual abuse of children in online spaces, particularly in semi-urban and rural regions.
- 2) Inadequate cyber training for prosecutors and police officers undermines the efficacy of the POCSO Act, which establishes a robust legislative framework.
- 3) The fear of societal reaction, lack of confidence in the legal system, and stigma all contribute to under-reporting, which is a significant concern.
- 4) There is a lack of standard accountability on digital platforms, which causes content removal and information sharing with law authorities to be delayed.
- 5) When it comes to protecting children, the current system is more concerned with punishment than with prevention, early intervention, and education.

6. Conclusion

Child safety issues have changed due to the proliferation of digital media, necessitating a review of current social and legal safeguards. This study shows that social attitudes, levels of awareness, and institutional capability greatly influence the success of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 in the digital age, even if the act creates a complete legal framework for protecting children. Issues with reporting online abuse persist due to factors such as low digital literacy, fear of reputational injury, and persistent stigma. Additionally, enforcement is hindered by a lack of cyber experience and lengthy procedural delays. These facts show that modern

child protection policies need a combination of strong legislation, coordinated social action, institutional change, and technological accountability to keep kids safe. Children need a comprehensive socio-legal plan that prioritizes prevention, education, and responsive judicial systems if they are to be adequately protected.

7. Recommendations

- 1) Strengthen coordination between child protection laws and cyber laws to ensure clarity in handling offences involving digital platforms.
- 2) Enhance cyber training for law enforcement and judicial officers to improve investigation and prosecution of online child abuse cases.
- 3) Develop confidential and child-friendly reporting systems that reduce fear and stigma associated with disclosure.
- 4) Promote nationwide awareness programmes for parents, teachers, and children on digital safety and legal rights.
- 5) Impose greater accountability on digital intermediaries to promptly detect and remove harmful content involving minors.
- 6) Integrate digital safety education into school curricula to empower children with knowledge and self-protection skills.
- 7) Strengthen inter-agency coordination among police, child welfare committees, and cyber units for faster and more effective responses.

References

- [1] Saraf, A. (2025). Socio Legal Study on the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Children with Special Reference to

POCSO Act, 2012 in Akola City—A Survey. Criminal Law.

[2] Anuragi, P. K., Hassan, A., Verma, A., Chaudhary, A., Mehta, A., & Datta, A. (2024). Protection Of Children from Online Sexual Abuse, Extant Legal Framework And Indian Constitution. *Frontiers in Health Informatics*, 13(3).

[3] Goswami, G. K. (2020). Role of Forensics in Strengthening Child Rights under the POCSO Act, 2012. DSc Dissertation submitted in National Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar, 72.

[4] Choudhuri, A. (2019). Conceptualizing Children's Rights in Digital Spaces: Emerging Issues and Challenges. *Socio-Legal Rev.*, 15, 151.

[5] KS, A. (2021). Sexual Abuse of Women and Children: A Critical Study with Special Reference to Indian Laws on Rape Victims. *Indian JL & Legal Rsch.*, 3, 1.

[6] Chatteraj, P. (2025). Child Protection in India: Assessing Multi-disciplinary Response Mechanisms.

[7] Zhang, W., & Chawla, A. (2022). Legislating Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse in India and China: A Divergence of Legislative Choice. *Socio-Legal Rev.*, 18, 230.

[8] Sadiq, S. S., & Rai, D. N. Prevention and Recovery Strategies for Children Affected by Sexual Abuse as Per Pocso Act in India. Available at SSRN 5281728.

[9] Jakhmola, A. (2021). The (POCSO) Act, 2012: A Legal Research Analyzing the Gaps and Challenges in the Legislation (Doctoral dissertation, Institute of Law, NU).

[10] Kumar, S. (2023). Access to justice and sexual violence against children in India: an empirical study of the reforms under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act 2012 (Doctoral dissertation, Birkbeck, University of London).

[11] Kumar, S. (2022). Child Sexual Abuse Cases in India and Judicial Officers' Perceptions and Experiences of POCSO-Related Special Training. *Socio-Legal Rev.*, 18, 264.

[12] Kumar, S. (2022). Child Sexual Abuse Cases in India and Judicial Officers' Perceptions and Experiences of POCSO-Related Special Training. *Socio-Legal Rev.*, 18, 264.

[13] Bhushan, M. (2025, June). Crossing Boundaries: The Impact of International Data Transfer Regulations on POCSO Enforcement and Global Child Privacy Safeguards. In National Seminar on Enhancing Privacy Protection in the Digital Age: Legal Challenges & Innovations (NSEPPDA 2025) (pp. 40-55). Atlantis Press.

[14] Pradhan, A. (2025). An Overview of Child Rights in India. Available at SSRN 5216201.

[15] Nandan, P. (2022). POCSO Act and Juvenile Justice: An Analysis of Existing Laws and Practices in India. *Issue 6 Indian JL & Legal Rsch.*, 4, 1.