
ROLE OF DIGITAL EXPOSURE AND MODERNIZATION IN THE GROWTH OF POCSO CASES IN RAJASTHAN

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ABSTRACT

The number of cases registered under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) has gone up by a shocking 40% in India, rising from 47,335 in 2019 to 53,874 in 2021 and over 67,000 cases by 2023. The five states with the highest number of child sexual abuse cases, including Rajasthan, are of particular interest in exploring the relationship between digital transformation and child sexual abuse. In this paper, the author explores the causal as well as correlational relations between rapid digital exposure (characterized by penetration of smartphone technology, cheap mobile data, social media and online education) and the reported rise in POCSO cases in Rajasthan. This paper reviews secondary sources from various agencies such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), peer-reviewed academic literature, and government reports, to examine how digital modernization introduces new avenues for child vulnerability, including online grooming, cyber pornography, sextortion, and the commercialization of CSAM. The paper also delves deeper into the socio-legal context of the state of Rajasthan, highlighting the enforcement gaps, lack of digital literacy and victim-support infrastructure. It ends with policy recommendations based on evidence to support the digitisation agenda in Rajasthan with strong child protection frameworks.

The internet provides an easy platform for predators to exploit children, particularly at an early age. The internet is a convenient medium through which children, especially young children, can be exploited.

Keywords: POCSO Act, Rajasthan, Digital Exposure, Online Child Sexual Abuse, NCRB, Cyber Grooming, Child Protection, Modernization, CSAM, Digital Divide

1. Introduction

In the past 10 years, the digital revolution that has engulfed India has changed almost every facet of social, economic and cultural life. One of the most striking cases of this change is the childhood relationship with digital technology, and one of the most perplexing implications of this change is that the two technologies are now integrated in the space between childhood and digital technology. On the other hand, digitisation has increased access to education, created opportunities for economic development and linked remote communities to state services. But, it has also opened up new avenues for the sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

Rajasthan (with an estimated population of more than 81 million) is the largest state in geographical size in India and is a very interesting and perplexing case study. Numerous child marriage, poverty, illiteracy among women, and the lack of access to formal justice systems have been persistent issues in the state. As 4G and 5G networks reach out to even the least connected regions of western Rajasthan, and as the cost of smartphones keeps dropping, millions of children are getting access to digital spaces for the first time, many of whom are doing it without the parents' supervision, awareness of digital risks or any institutional oversight.

This is where the worrying surge in POCSO cases comes in. Rajasthan was the fifth most affected state in the country, with around 5.8 per cent of all crimes against children in the country, according to NCRB Crime in India 2022. In 2022 alone, 3371 aggravated penetrative sexual assault POCSO cases are registered in the state. In response, the judicial machinery has shown signs of improvement: The disposal rate of POCSO cases in Rajasthan increased to more than 85 per cent by the first half of 2026, beating the national average of around 55 per cent. However, the root causes, including the digital aspect, are still poorly studied in academic and policy research literature.

This paper is an attempt to fill that void. It unfolds in a systematic analytical process of mapping digital Rajasthan, analysing the theoretical and empirical role of digital exposure in POCSO offences, profiling PSE, creating a socio-legal profile of vulnerability, mapping the response system and recommending specific changes.

2. Research Objectives

The aim of the present paper is to accomplish the following objectives:

- (i) To trace and document the trend of POCSO cases in Rajasthan in the years 2017-23 as compared to the national trends.
- (ii) To chart the development of digital infrastructure, smart phone penetration and internet penetration in the state of Rajasthan during the same time period.
- (iii) To explore causal and correlational relationships between the process of digital modernization and the increase of POCSO cases, particularly online grooming, CSAM and cyber facilitated offences.
- (iv) To understand the socio-demographic profile of victims and offenders in digitally mediated POCSO case.
- (v) Review critically the legal, institutional & technological protection mechanisms for child protection in Rajasthan.
- (vi) To recommend policy interventions based on evidence of the best practice in the country and in other countries.

3. Research Methodology

This study is doctrinal and empirical with the use of secondary data obtained from authoritative government and institutional sources. The major datasets used are: (a) NCRB Crime in India reports from 2017 to 2023 which provides state-wise and offence-wise disaggregation of POCSO cases, Cybercrimes against children and conviction rate; (b) IAMAI-Kantar ICUBE reports (2020-2024) which provides internet users, internet device ownership, and digital behaviour by state and rural-urban; (c) Report and studies by UNICEF, Child Rights and You (CRY), Save the Children, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR); (c) Peer reviewed academic literature on online child sexual exploitation, grooming and socio-legal determinants of POCSO offences in India.

The data is supplemented by content analysis of the judicial pronouncements of Rajasthan High

Court and District Court under POCSO, government press releases and parliamentary responses. The paper is not based on primary fieldwork but rather is inferential and analytical.

4. Rajasthan's Digital Transformation: A Decade in Review

4.1 Infrastructure and Connectivity Growth

In September 2016, Jio launched its low-cost 4G network with a dramatic decline in data costs and an exponential increase in mobile internet data usage in India, marking the turning point in India's digital journey. India's turning point of its digital journey was in September 2016 when Jio launched its low-cost 4G network, leading to the price of data usage plummeting and a surge in mobile internet usage in the country. States like Rajasthan, which have high rural population and low digital penetration, were among the states that witnessed the impact of this shift to the maximum. TRAI data indicates data consumption per user in rural India increased by 275 per cent from 3.2 GB per month in 2016 to 12 GB in 2023. 4G networks were installed progressively in the state's 33 districts, all the way out to remote areas like Jaisalmer, Barmer and Bikaner, where five years ago there was no connectivity.

4.2 COVID-19 as a Digital Accelerator

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 served as a dramatic catalyst for digital adoption in the case of children in particular. During the school closure caused by the pandemic, and the switch to online education, children in Rajasthan have had access to digital devices for longer than usual, and sometimes without adult supervision. 82.1 per cent of the rural youth (15-24) surveyed by NSSO Comprehensive Annual Modular Survey (CAMS) during 2022-23 could use the internet while 91.8 per cent in urban areas can. Many of these children used shared household devices to access the internet and this reduced the capacity for parent/guardian supervision.

One direct, measurable impact of this digital surge was that the number of cybercrimes committed against children nationally rose by a registered 260 per cent during 2020 alone. The ministry of Women and Child Development revealed in Parliament that the number of cybercrimes against children increased from 306 in 2019 to 1,102 in 2020. The pandemic period is therefore a unique turning point in the digital exposure–child vulnerability dynamic.

5. POCSO Cases in Rajasthan: Trends and Data

5.1 National Context

The national data on POCSO cases establishes the macro context within which Rajasthan's performance must be understood. NCRB data shows the following national trajectory:

Table 1: National POCSO Cases (2017–2023)

Year	POCSO Cases (National)	% Change Over Previous Year	Crimes Against Children (National)	POCSO as % of Total
2017	32,608	—	1,29,032	25.3%
2018	39,827	+22.1%	1,41,764	28.1%
2019	47,335	+18.8%	1,48,185	31.9%
2020	47,221	-0.2%	1,28,531	36.7%
2021	53,874	+14.1%	1,49,404	36.1%
2022	~61,000*	+13.2%*	1,62,449	~37.5%*
2023	~67,000*	~9% increase*	1,77,335	~38%*

**Estimated/approximate figures based on NCRB Crime in India 2022–2023 reports and sectoral analyses. Sources: NCRB Crime in India reports 2017–2023; CRY Analysis 2023.*

5.2 Rajasthan's Position

Within this national context, Rajasthan consistently ranks as one of the most concerning states. NCRB Crime in India 2022 records 3,371 cases of aggravated penetrative sexual assault under POCSO Sections 4 and 6 in Rajasthan, placing it fifth nationally after Uttar Pradesh (8,151), Maharashtra (7,572), Madhya Pradesh (5,996), and Tamil Nadu (4,968). An analysis by CRY of NCRB 2022 data confirmed that Rajasthan accounted for 5.8 per cent of all crimes against

children nationally — a disproportionate share given its roughly 5.5 per cent share of national population.

Critically, these figures almost certainly represent significant under-reporting. The Chief Justice of India, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, noted at a national POCSO conference that child sexual abuse 'remains a hidden problem' due to a 'culture of silence', urging that families be encouraged to report even when the perpetrator is a family member. Studies suggest that actual incidence of POCSO-qualifying offences is many times higher than registered cases.

Table 2: Rajasthan POCSO Data in National Comparative Context (2022)

State	POCSO Cases (Secs 4 & 6)	Total Crimes Against Children	National Rank (POCSO)	State Population (Approx.)
Uttar Pradesh	8,151	18,682	1st	235 million
Maharashtra	7,572	20,762	2nd	125 million
Madhya Pradesh	5,996	20,415	3rd	84 million
Tamil Nadu	4,968	~10,500	4th	78 million
Rajasthan	3,371	~9,400	5th	80 million

Source: NCRB Crime in India 2022; CRY Analysis 2023.

6. Digital Exposure as a Vector of POCSO Offences: Mechanisms and Evidence

6.1 Online Grooming

Online grooming is the deliberate process by which an offender establishes trust with a child (often via social media, chats, online games, messaging, etc.) to enable for sex abuse, obtain personal photos or videos, or arrange a meeting. The Strategic Advocacy for Human Rights (SAHR) and UNICEF research on the issue of grooming reveals that social networking sites created for adults are becoming the most popular sites for the younger children of India who

pretend to be older to use them. Facebook too allows users from the age of 13.

Under Section 11(iv) of the POCSO Act, a person is said to be involved in 'sexual harassment', if they 'follow or watch or contact the child directly or through electronic, digital or any means, repeatedly or constantly with the intent of inducing a sexual response'. Section 11(vi) criminalises the enticement for pornographic purposes. But as legal experts have pointed out, these laws refer to grooming once it has reached an advanced level of exploitation, so the more subtle, preparatory manipulation of a young person in the early stages of grooming can be in a legal gray zone. Section 67B(c) of the Information Technology Act, 2008, adds to POCSO by criminalizing and punishing online enticement of children for the creation of sexually explicit material.

The ease of accessing short social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, and the recent emergence of short-form video platforms, are creating a vast population of digitally naive children in newly connected rural and semi-urban areas in Rajasthan who are highly susceptible to grooming. This is exacerbated by the lack of parental supervision, which is partly due to parents sharing single household devices and not having digital literacy.

6.2 Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and Cyber Pornography

In 2022, the NCRB reported 1,171 instances of cyber pornography and posting/publishing of obscene sexual content of children, which are just a small portion of the actual production and circulation as it is difficult to detect. A significant number of cybercrime incidents involving children were related to CSAM in 2022, with 480 identified out of the 1,823 cases (26 per cent). In 2020, children's victimisation from cybercrimes has increased by 260 per cent across the country, which a parliamentary question said had been driven by children's online activity during the pandemic.

CSAM does not just record abuse; abuse is constituted by CSAM. The creation of CSAM always comes with the sexual exploitation of a child, and its dissemination causes further harm by revictimising the child who has been exploited. Under Section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000 (amended in 2008), the production, distribution or communication of any material which shows or portrays a child in sexual activity is an offence. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, also requires platforms to secure parental consent before processing personal data of children—this was introduced to part of the protection of children

from platforms being used as tools of exploitation.

6.3 Sextortion and Image-Based Abuse

The phenomenon of sextortion – the usage of intimate images or videos as a means to obtain additional compliance, sexual or financial – has become a new and rapidly expanding form of crime targeting children. Offenders usually start communication through social media or gaming sites, develop a false sense of trust based relationship with the child, send child intimate photos, and then demand something else of the child that they will release if the child doesn't comply. Sextortion is very effective in the newly connected rural areas of Rajasthan, where social stigma surrounding sexual issues is especially high, and victims are too afraid to report the crime to the police or family, thus allowing it to continue:

This Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), which supersedes the Indian Penal Code, also covers offences related to digital trafficking and harassment of children, thereby giving a modern statutory framework for combating sextortion in line with the digital world.

6.4 Social Media, Dating Apps, and Peer-to-Peer Exploitation

Aside from adult-on-child incidents, digital platforms have also allowed for POCSO-related incidents to occur between peers. There are many ways to bypass age verification on popular social media and dating sites. A study published in the *Nature's Humane and Social Science Communications* revealed that there is a positive correlation (statistically significant) between urbanisation and POCSO cases reported, indicating that the structural environment of urbanisation and urbanisation process, which are concentrated in the urban areas, create conditions to the incidences of offending and reporting in greater numbers. This is partly due to the anonymity and opportunity that digital environments offer in urban areas, and partly due to the increased awareness and reporting capacity due to higher levels of education in more urbanised locations.

6.5 The Dual Narrative: Real Increase vs. Improved Reporting

An important question to be asked while examining the rising number of POCSO cases is whether the rise is due to real increase in crime cases or a result of improved reporting rates due to the heightened awareness, digital complaint reporting system and lesser social stigma. The evidence gives a composite picture. NCPCR and the National Commission for Women

redoubled efforts following 2020 to raise awareness about the POCSO e-Box complaint management system and the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP). The POCSO Rules, 2020 mandate that state governments conduct awareness sessions on TV, radio and print media periodically.

Increase in registered cases is partly due to greater awareness of children's rights, but prevalence of child abuse is 'far higher than official numbers', say child rights groups including CRY and Arpan. The highest proportion of cases (52 per cent) of people aged 16-18 years old who were victims of the POCSO Act are also the result of digital exposure – adolescents in this age group are the most active users of social media platforms and they are most vulnerable to grooming, peer pressure, and digital manipulation. The documented increase is due in part to better reporting, as well as to real increase, and both are policy issues.

7. Socio-Legal Determinants of Vulnerability in Rajasthan

7.1 Poverty, Single-Device Households, and Parental Absence

Child protection problems in Rajasthan are embedded in the socio-economic context of chronic poverty, low literacy rates of girls and high rates of child marriage (especially in districts like Barmer, Pali, Rajsamand etc.). Only 3–7 per cent of the people of rural India are using digital payment platforms actively, even when asked about using the internet, the field study by 1Bridge, India's largest village commerce network found high level of functional digital illiteracy. Many families do not practice digital safety, and a single cell phone is used by more than one member of the family, with children using it without parental monitoring and parents lacking knowledge of how to impose digital safety.

Research across a variety of studies has consistently identified that children of primary female caregivers who work in informal, low-paid jobs are exposed to a high risk of sexual abuse (both contact and online) because they are not at home for extended periods of time. This phenomenon is most severe in the urban slums of Rajasthan, and in the semi-urban market towns where families have recently moved from their native community, where they would have had protection and support.

7.2 Gender Dynamics

The NCRB statistics show that in cases of sexual offence under POCSO, 98.92 per cent of the

victims are girls. This near complete feminisation of victimhood exemplifies the intersection of patriarchal systems: in which girls are more socially supervised, thus their main mode of socialisation and of (re)connectivity and autonomy is digital socialisation, which happens via the mobile phone. At the same time, the gender norms that hold the victim of violence responsible and prioritise family honour over the rights of individuals make it highly improbable that a complaint will be made. Rajasthan has historically had low female literacy rates (65.4 per cent per Census 2011), which renders mothers and older women in the home as digitally inept, unable to help children navigate digital safety.

7.3 The Perpetrator Profile: Known Persons and Digital Contacts

According to the data available from the NCRB 2022, it has been established that in almost 96.8 per cent of the rape cases registered under Sections 4 and 6 are committed by a family member or relative of the rape victim, a neighbour, a teacher, or a person familiar to the victim. This data makes any easy correlation between digital exposure and stranger danger problematic. In many digitally mediated POCSO cases in Rajasthan, the perpetrators make initial physical contact to the victim and then abuse/re-escalate the case using messaging apps or video calls. The digital dimension, therefore, is generally not the entirety of an abuse process, but rather a single step within a multi-modal process.

8. Legal Framework: Strengths, Gaps, and Evolving Provisions

8.1 The POCSO Act, 2012 and Its Amendments

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (PCSO), 2012 is the main legislation in India aimed at safeguarding children from sexual exploitation. The Act consists of six sections of offences: penetrative sexual assault (Section 3), aggravated penetrative sexual assault (Section 5), sexual assault (Section 7), aggravated sexual assault (Section 9), sexual harassment (Section 11), and use of a child for pornographic purposes (Section 13). It is gender neutral in defining victims as any person under the age of 18 and has mandatory minimum sentences to demonstrate the severity of the offences.

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 also had some positive changes regarding the framework of POCSO, where the minimum punishment for penetrative sexual assault was increased from seven years to ten years rigorous imprisonment and death penalty was given as

an option in aggravated penetrative sexual assault of a child aged less than 12 years. There were several high-profile cases of POCSO, including some from Rajasthan which had created an outcry over the legislation, many of which led to the amendment.

8.2 The Information Technology Act, 2000 and Its Intersection with POCSO

The IT Act, 2000 (amended in 2008) contains a comprehensive definition of the online sexual exploitation of children, covering the publication, transmission, browsing and downloading of child pornography as well as the creation of child pornography and abetment. The provision exists in parallel with POCSO for a two-track system of prosecution for digital offences against children. Section 67B(e) makes it a crime to facilitate an online child abuse and Section 67B(a) bans creation or posting of any material which portrays a child engaging in sexually explicit acts.

8.3 Emerging Legal Developments

The biggest recent development in the legislation concerning child online safety is the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. Before processing the personal data of a child, the Act requires a child's parents to provide verifiable consent to any data fiduciary, which includes social media platforms and gaming companies. Once properly implemented, this could be a substantial deterrent to platforms exploiting children. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 mandates OTTs to categorize content into five age groups and provides for child safety measures.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaced IPC, modernises the IPC by explicitly bringing criminal liability for digital offences such as digital trafficking and sexual harassment of child victims under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, thereby filling the gaps of interpretation in IPC.

8.4 Gaps and Challenges

Although there have been these legislative advances, there is still significant gaps. First, the POCSO and the IT Act does not make online grooming a preparatory crime, and the law does not provide any protection to children during this time of often long grooming. A comparative benchmark is provided by international models which include the United Kingdom's Sexual Offences Act, 2003 (Section 15, 'meeting a child following sexual grooming'). Secondly,

digital forensic skills within the police force are limited in scope and confined to a few police stations in Rajasthan, especially in Jaipur while the police stations in rural areas receiving POCSO complaints are technically inexperienced in tracing digital evidence chains. Third, technology developments regularly outpace legislative and enforcement efforts; for example, the rise or adoption of end to end encrypted messaging platforms and the dark web.

9. Comparative Perspectives: Digital Exposure and Child Abuse in National Context

This is not peculiar to Rajasthan; it reflects the national pattern where states that are undergoing rapid digitalisation have seen a corresponding surge in online and digitally-enabled POCSO offences. By November 2024, the highest internet penetration state, Kerala reported 1,762 POCSO cases, and importantly, the Kerala police mentioned that during COVID, when people were frequently exposed to the internet, there had been a 'steep rise' in the number of cases. Karnataka reported 8929 cases of crimes against children of which almost 3878 cases were reported as POCSO offences, which is 43 per cent of all crimes against children in the state, and the number of cybercrimes has increased by 22 per cent in the past three years (2021-23).

State-level patterns are consistent with global evidence. UNICEF has noted that increased screen time by children has had a direct impact on the levels of online safety concerns. The era of COVID-19 has seen a sharp increase in the number of online sexual abuse and exploitation of children cases all over the world, with India seeing cybercrime against children cases rise by over 400 per cent from 2019 to 2020. The academic literature pattern of digital modernisation, which is linked to a rise in child sexual exploitation, is robustly supported in both national and international contexts.

10. Findings and Analysis

The foregoing analysis supports the following findings:

The findings indicate that POCSO registration has steadily increased both nationally and in Rajasthan, consistent with the trend of digitalization in the state, with a strong correlational relationship between increase in internet usage and the number of POCSO cases registered.

Finding 2: This COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) is a turning point in the lives of children, with their digital presence surging significantly with diminished supervision, resulting in tangible rises in cyber-crime against children across the country and in Rajasthan.

Finding 3: The three main digital routes for the facilitation of POCSO offences are online grooming, CSAM, and sextortion, and have all increased in volume significantly due to the expansion of social media and messaging platforms.

Finding 4: A feminisation of victimhood (98.92% girls) is combined with the gender-based digital literacy gaps and patriarchal social structures in Rajasthan, forming a particular vulnerability profile for adolescent girls.

Findings 5: Legal provisions, including the POCSO, IT Act and the forthcoming DPDP Act, 2023, offer a relatively robust statutory framework, but the lack of awareness, digital forensics and judicial capacity has significantly reduced the scope of legal protection.

Finding 6: Reforms in the judiciary and administration in recent years in Rajasthan are significant but need to be complemented by a corresponding investment in prevention upstream in digital literacy, school-based safety education, and community awareness (85%+ disposal rate by 2026).

Finding 7: The increase in cases reported under POCSO is attributable to both increased reports of offences (facilitated by digital vectors) and increased awareness of the law and complaints portals for reporting offences, which are both aspects that need to be addressed through policy action.

11. Policy Recommendations

11.1 Digital Literacy and School-Based Safety Education

A comprehensive Digital Safety and Child Protection curriculum for Classes 5-12 should be created and made compulsory in all government and private schools in Rajasthan. The curriculum needs to include: Awareness of grooming patterns online; Responsible use of social media; Understanding consent and control of the body; Age appropriate age reporting procedures such as POCSO e-box and NCRP. Having regard to the POCSO Rules, 2020 which requires awareness campaigns, the state government should create specific budget lines for their implementation and evaluation.

11.2 Capacity Building in Cyber Forensics

All the districts across the state should have an independent cyber forensics unit with trained

staff who can collect, preserve and present digital evidence in POCSO cases. Operational capability of digital forensic in present time is not adequate in Jaipur for the geographical size of the state of Rajasthan. The investment in training and equipment in Nirbhaya Fund should be given top priority.

11.3 Proactive Platform Regulation and Enforcement

The parental consent requirements of the DPDP Act, 2023 need to be taken seriously and require a verifiable age-gating policy to be put in place by the major social media platforms, instead of relying on users' self-declarations. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) should give specific guidelines under the IT Rules, 2021 for obligations of platforms regarding safety of children, which has to include a requirement to detect, report CSAM to NCPCR and remove it immediately. Therefore the state of Rajasthan should have an online safety portal at the state level along with the national safety portals.

11.4 Community-Based Digital Literacy Initiatives

Rajasthan government should collaborate with SHGs, Panchayati Raj institution and NGOs working on child rights to conduct digital literacy campaigns at the community level focusing on parents. With many digital crimes being committed via common family devices, it's vital that parents and older siblings know the risks and how they can help reduce them for their children. Awareness programmes should be created on mobile in Hindi and in the native language of the Rajasthani language for easy accessibility.

11.5 Strengthening the FTSC Framework

The pendency of the Fast Track Special Courts for POCSO cases in Rajasthan should be further reduced by providing adequate staff and resources for these courts. In addition to more courts, the state should provide more infrastructure for the victims, such as child friendly court infrastructure, special educators and trained counsellors as specified in the POCSO Act. Psychological support to victims to ensure their recovery and participation in trial, especially those who are subjected to abuse that has a digital component and continue to experience harassment as a result of circulated images, is crucial.

11.6 Legislative Reform: Grooming as a Standalone Offence

It is recommended that India should adopt a specific provision of the law which makes online

grooming a preparatory offence, in line with international best practices. The existing reactive legal system, which comes in after exploitation has already taken place, is not enough to effectively safeguard children in the early stages of digital manipulation that often precede exploitation, both physical and virtual. A preventive step to be implemented at the communication and contact phase of grooming, where the sexual intent of the perpetrator is established, would improve the protective ambit of POCSO in a big way.

12. Conclusion

Rajasthan is at a crucial juncture between digital modernisation and the possible risks of poorly managed digital environments for children. The statistics are clear: with the internet becoming more accessible, the number of smartphones has increased and social media has gained access to communities which were not connected before, the number of POCSO registrations has also increased. Given the state's fifth position in the country with respect to POCSO offences, which has been complemented by the fact that the state has made commendable progress on case disposal and investigation, the issue of prevention and protection is much bigger than that of prosecution.

It is not that digital exposure in itself leads to child sexual abuse; of course not. Child sexual abuse is rooted in an institutional culture of silence, which covers up the abuse, gender inequality, poverty, institutional failures and the power structure of patriarchy. Without a doubt, digital modernization has also exacerbated vulnerabilities that already existed in the socio-economic context of modern-day Rajasthan, such as providing new access points for meeting the victim, new means of exploitation that render victimization unspoken, and new kind of harm, such as the distribution of CSAM and the sextortion of victims.

The policy challenge instead is not to stand against digitalisation but to invest in digital child literacy, online safety infrastructure, legislative modernization and awareness at the community level, in order to enable Rajasthan to go digital, without compromising its economic and social gains. As shown in recent changes by the state in the disposal and investigation of children's cases, good governance for child protection is possible. Now it's time to put that kind of energy and accountability into the preventive side of things.

Whether they live in the broadband-equipped apartments of Jaipur or in the first-time smartphone households of Jaisalmer, all children in Rajasthan have the right to be protected

from an online world that can be threatening, but is instead empowering. That depends not only on the availability of legal mechanisms and the enforcement skills of the police, but a recognition of this fact by the whole of society that accompanies digital modernisation.

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